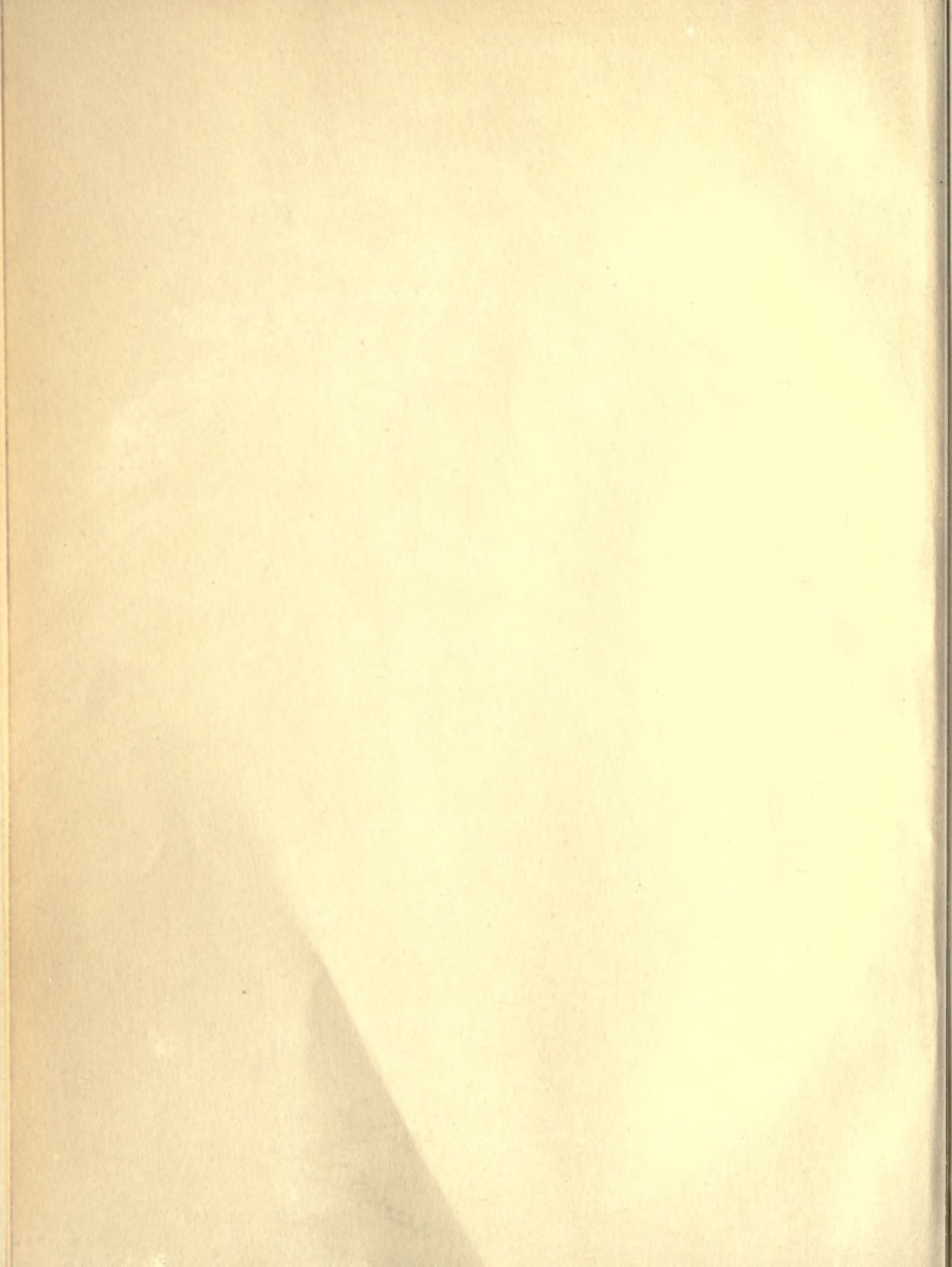
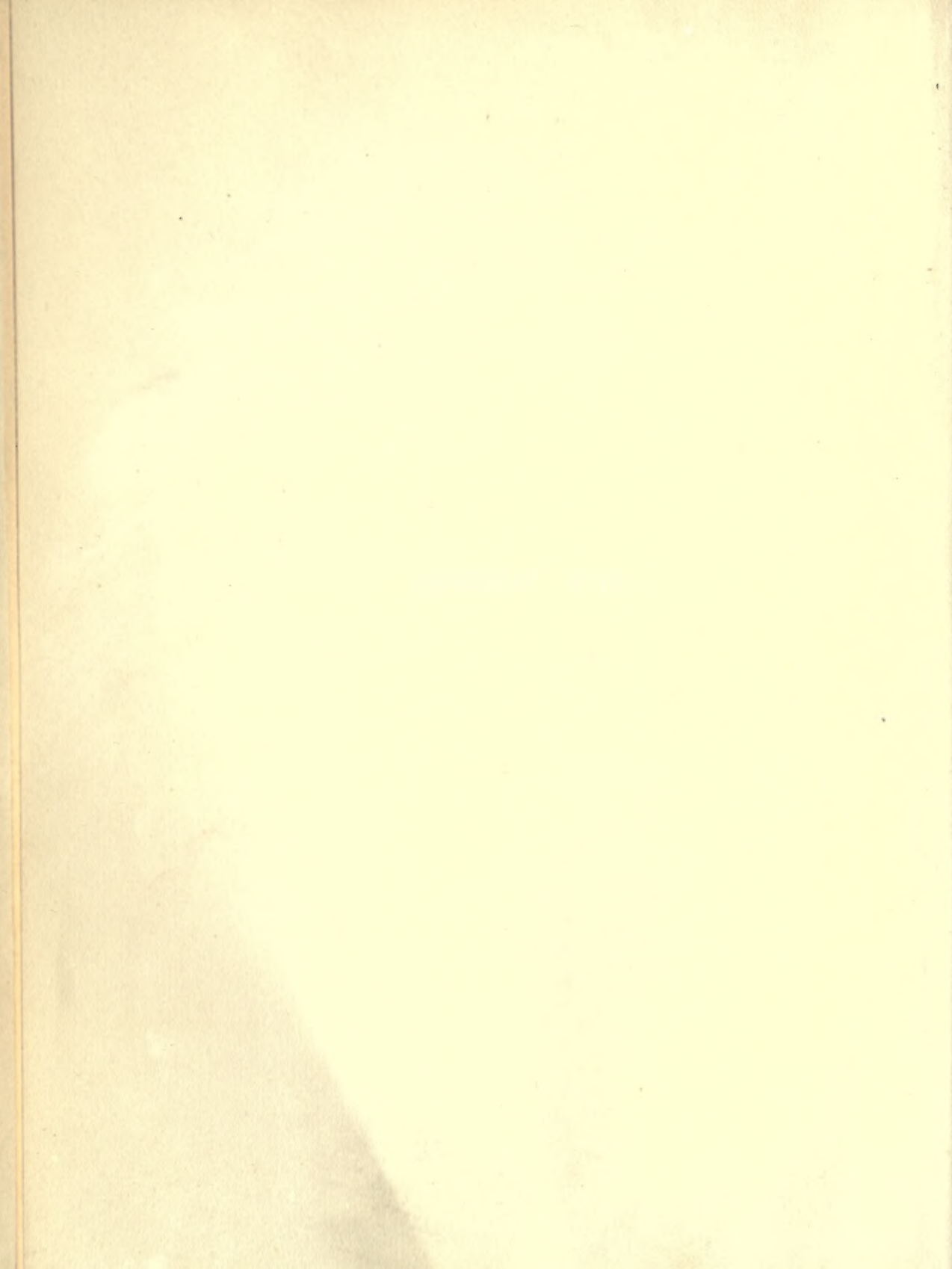


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NEW NUMBERS



New Numbers

VOL. 1 (nos. 1-4)
(F - Dec 1914)

Lascelles Abercrombie
Rupert Brooke
John Drinkwater
Wilfrid Wilson Gibson



304145
21.9.24

1914

PUBLISHED AT RYTON, DYMCK, GLOUCESTER.

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NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF NEW YORK

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John Drinkwater

PUBLISHED AT
RYTON, DYMOCK, GLOUCESTER.



Bloodybush Edge is a remote spot on the border-line between England and Scotland, marked by a dumpy obelisk, on which is inscribed an old scale of tolls. A rough sandy road runs down across the dark moors, into England on the one hand, and into Scotland on the other. It is a fine, starry night in early September. Daft Dick, a fantastic figure, in appearance half-gamekeeper, half-tramp (dressed as he is in cast-off clothes of country-gentlemen) swings up the road from the Scottish side, singing.

“ Now Liddisdale has ridden a raid ;
But I wat they better hae stayed at hame ;
For Michael o’ Winfield, he lies dead ;
And Jock o’ the Side is prisoner ta’en.”

He stands for a moment, looking across the fells, which are very dark, in spite of the starry sky ; then flings himself down in the heather, with his back to the obelisk, and lights his pipe. Presently, he sees a dark figure, stumbling with uncertain steps across the boggy moor ; and watches it keenly as it approaches, until it reaches the road, when he sees that it is a strange man, evidently a tramp.

Tramp : A track, at last, thank God !

Dick :

Aye, there be whiles

When beaten tracks are welcome.

Tramp :

Who the . . . Oh !

I didn’t count on having company
Again in this world ; and when I heard a voice
I thought it must be another ghost. It’s queer
Hearing a voice bleat when you haven’t heard
A mortal voice for ages. I’ve not changed
A word with a soul since noon ; and when you spoke
It gave me quite a turn. A feather, Lord !
But it wouldn’t take the shadow of a feather
To knock me over. I’m in such a stickle,
Dead-beat, and fit to drop. To drop ! I’ve dropped
A hundred times already, humpty-dumpty !

Why, I've been tumbling in and out black holes,
Since sunset, on that god-forsaken moor,
Half-crazed with fear of . . . Ah, you've got a light :
And I've been tramping all the livelong day
With a pipeful of comfort in my waistcoat-pocket ;
And would have swopt the frizzling sun itself
For a match to kindle it. Thanks, mate, that's better.
And now, what was it you were saying, Old Cock,
When I mistook you then for Hamlet's father ?
Lord ! if you'd seen him at the " Elephant,"
In queer, blue sheeny armour, you'd have shivered.
" I am thy father's spirit," he says, like that,
Down in his boots. But you were saying——

Dick : There are times
When beaten tracks are welcome.

Tramp : True for you :
And truer by a score of bumps, for me.
My neck's been broken half-a-dozen times :
My body's just an aching bag of bones.
I'm one big bruise from top to toe, as though
I'd played in the Cup Final, as the ball.
And mud, I'm mud to the eyes, and over, carrying
Half of the country that I've passed through on me.
My best suit, too ! And I was always faddy
About my clothes. My mother used to call me
Finicky Fred. If she could see me now !
I couldn't count the times that I've pitched headlong
Into black bog.

Dick : Aye, there are clarty bits
In Foulmire Moss. But what set you stravaging

Among the peat-hags at this time of night?
Unless you know the tracks by heart. . .

Tramp : I know
The Old Kent Road by heart.

Dick : The Old Kent Road?

Tramp : London, S.E. You've heard of London, likely?

Dick : Aye! aye! I've heard. . .

Tramp : Well, mate, I've walked from London.

Dick : You've walked from London here?

Tramp : Well, not to-day.
It must be nigh three hundred mile, I reckon.

Just five weeks, yesterday, since I set out :

But, as you say, I've walked from London, here :

Though where " here " is, the devil only knows !

What is " here " called, if it has aay name

But Back o' Beyond, or Wold's End, eh?

Dick : You're sitting
On Bloodybush Edge this moment.

Tramp : To think of that!
Bloodybush Edge! And that's what I have come to ;
While all my friends, the men and women I know,
Are strolling up and down the Old Kent Road,
Chattering and laughing by the lighted stalls
And the barrows of bananas and oranges ;
Or sitting snugly in bars ; while, here am I,
On Bloodybush Edge, talking to Hamlet's father.

Dick : My name's Dick Dodd.

Tramp : Well, no offence, Old Cock !
And Hamlet's father was a gentleman,
A king of ghosts ; and Lord ! but he could groan.

My name's . . . Jack Smith : and Jack would give a sovereign,
A sovereign down, if he could borrow it,
And drinks all round, and here's to you, and you !
Just to be sitting in The Seven Stars,
And listening to the jabber, just to snuff
A whiff of the smoke and spirit. Seven Stars !
I'm lodging under stars enough to-night :
Seven times seven hundred. . .

Dick : Often I have tried
To count them, lying here upon my back :
But they're too many for me. Just when you think
You've reckoned all between two sprigs of heather,
One tumbles from its place, or else a hundred
Spring out of nowhere. If you only stare
Hard at the darkest patch, for long enough,
You'll see that it's all alive with little stars ;
And there isn't any dark at all.

Tramp : No dark !
If you'd been tumbling into those black holes,
You'd not think overmuch of these same stars.
I couldn't see my hand before me. Stars !
Give me the lamps along the Old Kent Road :
And I'm content to leave the stars to you.
They're well enough ; but hung a trifle high
For walking with clean boots. Now a lamp or so . . .

Dick : If it's so fine and brave, the Old Kent Road,
How is it you came to leave it ?

Tramp : I'd my reasons.

Dick : Reasons ! Queer reasons surely to set you trapesing

Over Foulmire in the dark : though I could travel
The fells from here to Cheviot, blindfold. Aye !
And never come a cropper.

Tramp : 'Twas my luck,
My lovely luck, and naught to do with reasons—
My gaudy luck, and the devilish dust and heat,
And hell's own thirst that drove me ; and too snug
A bed among the heather. Oversleeping,
That's always played the mischief with me. Once
I slept till three in the morning, and . . .

Dick : Till three ?
You're an early bird, if you call that oversleeping.
Folk hereabouts are mostly astir by three :
But, city folk, I thought. . .

Tramp : I'm on the night-shift.
I sleep by day, for the most part, like a cat.
That's why, though dog-tired now, I couldn't sleep
A wink though you paid me gold down.

Dick : Night-shift, you !
And what may your job be ? Cat's night-shift, likely,
As well as day's sleep !

Tramp : Now, look here, Old Cock,
There's just one little thing that we could teach you
Down London way. Why, even babes in London
Know better than to ask too many questions.
You ask no questions, and you'll hear no lies,
Is the first lesson that's hammered into them.
No London gentleman asks questions. Lord !
If you went " What's-your-job ? "-ing down our way,
You'd soon be smelling someone's fist, I reckon ;

Or tripping over somebody in the dark
Upon the stairs : and with a broken neck,
Be left, still asking questions in your coffin,
Till the worms had satisfied you. Not that I
Have anything to hide, myself. I'm only
Advising you for your own good. But, old chap,
We were talking of something else . . . that hell-hot road.
I'd pegged along it through the blazing dust
From Bellingham, till I could peg no more,
My mouth was just a limekiln ; and each foot,
One bleeding blister. A kipper on the grid,
That's what I was on the road. And the heather looked
So cool and cosy, I left the road for a bit ;
And coming on a patch of wet green moss,
I took my boots off ; and it was so champion
To feel cold water squelching between my toes,
I paddled on like a child, till I came to a clump
Of heather in full bloom, just reeking honey ;
And curled up in it, and dropt sound asleep ;
And, when I wakened, it was dark, pitch-dark,
For all your stars. The sky was light enough,
Had I been travelling that way. But, for the road,
I hadn't a notion of its whereabouts.
A blessed babe-in-the-woods I was, clean lost ;
And fit to cry for my mammy. Babes-in-the-wood !
But there were two of them, for company,
And only one of me, by my lone self.
However, I said to myself : You've got to spend
A night in the heather. Well, you've known worse beds,
And worse bed-fellows than a sheep or so—
Trying to make believe I wasn't frightened.

And then, somehow, I couldn't, God knows why !
But I was scared : the loneliness, and all ;
The quietness, and the queer creepy noises ;
And something that I couldn't put a name to,
A kind of feeling in my marrow bones,
As though the great black hills against the sky
Had come alive about me in the night ;
And they were watching me ; as though I stood
Naked, in a big room, with blind men sitting,
Unseen, all round me, in the quiet darkness,
That was not dark to them. And all the stars
Were eyeing me ; and whisperings in the heather
Were like cold water trickling down my spine ;
And when I heard a cough. . .

Dick : A coughing sheep.

Tramp: May be: but 'twas a coughing ghost to me.
I've never yet set eyes on a ghost, unless . . . (*looking askance at*
Though I've often felt them near me. Once, when I. . . [Dick,
But, Lord, I'm talking, talking . . .

Dick : I've seen ghosts,
A hundred times. The ghosts of reivers ride
The fells at night ; and you'd have ghosts in plenty
About you, lad, though you were blind to them.
But, why d' you fear them ? There's no harm in ghosts.
Even should they ride over you, it's only
Like a cold wind blowing through you. The other night,
As I came down by Girsonsfield, the ghost
Of Parcy Reed, with neither hands nor feet,
Rode clean through me ; the false Halls, and the Croziers
Hard on his heels, though I kept clear of them ;

And often I've heard him, cracking his hunting-crop,
On a winter's night, when the winds were in full cry ;
And heard the yelp of the pack, and the horn's halloo,
Over the howl of the storm, or caught at dawn
A glimpse of the tails of his green hunting-jacket.
Whenever you shudder, or break in a cold sweat,
Not knowing why, folk say that someone's stepping
Over your grave ; but that's all stuff and nonsense.
It's only some poor ghost that's walking through you.

Tramp : Well, ghosts or sheep, I'd had my fill of them ;
Went all to pieces, took to my heels and ran ;
And hadn't run three yards, when I pitched headlong.
That was the first. Since then, I've felt the bottom
Of every hole, five hundred to my reckoning,
From there to here.

Dick : You've covered some rough ground.
But you have doubled back upon your tracks,
If you were making North.

Tramp : Aye : I was making
For Scotland. I'd a notion . . .

Dick : Scotland lies
Under your left heel, though your right's in England.

Tramp : 'To think of that ! Well, I can't feel much difference
Twixt one and the other. Perhaps, if I'd my boots off
But, Hamlet's father, isn't it a king's bed
We're lying on, and sprawling over two countries !
And yet, I'd rather be in Millicent Place,
London, S.E., and sleeping three in a bed.
This room's too big for me, too wide and windy ;

The bed, too broad, and not what I call snug :
The ceiling, far too high, and full of eyes.
I hate the loneliness. I like to feel
There are houses, packed with people, all about me.
For miles on miles ; I'm fond of company ;
I'm only really happy in a throng,
Crowds jostling thick and hot about me. Here
I feel, somehow, as if I were walking naked
Among the hills, the last man left alive.
I haven't so much as set eyes on a house,
Not since I left that blistering road.

[illegible]

Tramp Well, country-people
Should be good neighbours, and quiet ; but, for me,
I'd rather be packed like herrings in a barrel.
I hate the loneliness : it makes me think.
I'm fond of company ; too fond at times.
If I hadn't been so fond of company
A while back, I'd have hardly been lying now
On Bloodybush Edge, talking of ghosts at midnight,
When I might be . . . but it won't bear thinking on..
Yet, even with you beside me, Bloodybush Edge
Is a size too big in beds—leaves too much room
For ghosts, to suit my fancy. Three in a bed,
And you sleep sound.

Dick And why should you fear ghosts,
When, one fine night, you'll be a ghost yourself?
How soon, who knows! Why, even at this moment,
If you had broken your neck among the moss-hags

You'd be your own ghost sitting there, not you.
If you hadn't been so muddy, and so frightened. . .
Nay; but I've seen too many ghosts in my time
For you to take me in. Ghosts often lean
Over me, when I'm fishing in the moonlight.
They're keen, are ghosts. I sometimes feel their breath
Upon my neck, when I am guddling trout;
Or the clutch of their clammy fingers on my wrist
When I am spearing salmon, lest I miss.
And always at the burning of the water
You'll see them lurking in the shadows, beyond
The flare and the smoke of the torches, in the night,
Eager as boys to join in the sport; and at times
When they have pressed too near, and a torch has flared,
I've seen the live flame running through their bodies.
But oftenest they appear to me when alone
I'm fishing like a heron; and last night
As I stooped over Deadwater, I felt. . .

Tramp: And you're an honest man to be asking questions
Of gentlemen on tour! So, you're a poacher,
A common poacher: though it must be rare sport,
I've often fancied. . .

Dick: To creep up to a pool
Where a big bull-trout lies beneath a boulder
With nose against the stream, his tail scarce flicking;
To creep up quiet and without a shadow,
And lie upon your belly in the gravel;
And slide your hands as noiseless as an otter
Into the water, icy-cold and aching,
And tickle, tickle, till you have him fuddled;

Then lift him cold and slithery, from the burn,
A quivering bit of silver in the moonlight. . .

Tramp : Aye, that must be rare sport ; but, for myself,
I'd rather manage without the help of ghosts.
Once, I remember, I was bending down—
'Twas in an empty house . . . I'd cut my thumb,
The window jamming somehow, a nasty cut :
The mark's still there . . (not that ! nay, that's the place
I was bitten by a friend) and as I fumbled
With a damned tricky lock, some Yankee patent,
I felt a ghost was standing close behind me ;
And dare not stir, or squint over my shoulder :
But crouched there, moving neither hand nor foot,
Till I was just a solid ache of terror.
And could have squealed aloud with the numb cramp,
And pins and needles in my arms and legs.
And then at last, when I was almost dropping,
I lost my head, took to my heels, and bolted
Headfirst down stairs, and through the broken window,
Leaving my kit and the swag, without a thought :
And never coming to my senses, till
I saw a bullseye glimmering down the lane.
And then I found my brow was bleeding, too—
At first I thought 'twas sweat—a three-inch cut,
Clean to the bone. I had to have it stitched.
I told the doctor that I'd put my head
Through a window in the dark, but not a word
About my body following it. The doctor,
He was a gentleman, and asked no questions.
A civil chap : he'd stitched my scalp before

Once, when the heel of a lady's slipper . . .

Dick : So you
Are a common poacher, too ; although you take
Only dead silver and gold. Still, it must be
A risky business, burgling, when the folk . . .

Tramp: Risk! aye, there's risk! That's where the fun comes in:
To steal into a house, with people sleeping
So warm and snug and innocent overhead;
To hear them snoring as you pass their doors
With all they're dreaming of stowed in your pockets;
To tiptoe from the attic to the basement,
With a chance that you may find on any landing
A door flung open, and a man to tackle.
It's only empty houses I'm afraid of.
I've more than once looked up a pistol's snout,
And never turned a hair . . . though once I heard
A telephone-bell ring in an empty house—
And I can hear the damned thing tinkling yet. . . .
I'm all in a cold sweat just thinking of it.
It tinkled, tinkled . . . Risk! Why man alive,
Life's all a risky business, till you're dead.
There's no risk then . . . unless . . . I never feared
A living man, sleeping or waking, yet.
But ghosts, well, ghosts are different somehow. There's
A world of difference between men and ghosts.
Let's think no more of ghosts—but lighted streets,
And crowds, and women; though it's my belief
There's not a woman in all this country-side.

Dick: There's womenfolk, and plenty. And they are kind,
The womenfolk, to me. Daft Dick is ever

A favourite with the womenfolk. His belly
Would oft go empty, were it not for them.

Tramp : You call those women, gawky, rawboned creatures,
Thin-lipped, hard-jawed, cold-eyed ! I like fat women.
If you could walk just now down the Old Kent Road,
And see the plump young girls in furs and feathers,
With saucy black eyes, sparkling in the gaslight ;
And looking at you, munching oranges,
Or whispering to each other with shrill giggles
As you go by, and nudging one another ;
Or standing with a soldier eating winkles,
Grimacing with the vinegar and pepper,
Then laughing so merrily you almost wish
You were a red-coat, too ! And the fat old mothers,
Too old for feathers and follies, with their tight
Nigh-bursting bodices, and their double chins,
They're homely, motherly and comfortable,
And do a man's eyes good. There's not a sight
In all the world that's half as rare to see
As a fat old wife with jellied eels and porter.
Aye, women should be plump . . . though Ellen Ann
Was neither old nor fat, when she and I
Were walking out together, and she'd red hair,
As red as blazes, and a peaked white face.
But 'twas her eyes, her eyes that always laughed,
And the merry way she had with her. . . But, Lord,
I'm talking ! Only mention petticoats,
And I'm the boy to talk till doomsday. Women !
If it hadn't been for a petticoat, this moment
I might be drinking my own health in the bar

Of The Seven Stars or The World Turned Upside Down,
Instead of . . . Well, Old Cock, it's good to have
Someone to talk to, after such a day.

You cannot get much further with a sheep ;
And I met none but sheep, and they all scuttled,
Not even stopping to pass the time of day,
And the birds, well, they'd enough to say, and more,
When I was running away from myself in the dark,
With their " Go back ! Go back ! "

Dick : You'd scared the grouse.
They talk like Christians. Often in the dawn . . .

Tramp: Bloodybush Edge! But why the Bloodybush?
I see no bush. . . .

Dick : Some fight in the old days, likely,
In the days when men were men. . . .

Tramp : I little thought,
When I set out from London on my travels,
That I was making straight for Bloodybush Edge.
I had my reasons, but, reason or none, it's certain
That I'd have turned up here, someday or other :
For I must travel. I've the itching foot.
I talk of London, when I'm well out of it
By a hundred miles or so ; but, when I'm in it,
There always comes a time when I couldn't stay
A moment longer, not for love or money :
Though in the end it always has me back.
I cannot rest. There's something in my bones—
They'll need to screw the lid down with brass screws
To keep them in my coffin. When I'm dead,
If I don't walk, I'll be surprised, I . . . Lord,

We're on to ghosts again! But I'm the sort
That's always hankering to be elsewhere,
Wherever I am. Some men can stick to a job
As though they liked it. I'm not made that way.
I couldn't heave the same pick two days running.
I've tried it: and I know. I must have change.
It's in my blood. And work, why work's for fools.

Dick : Aye, fools indeed : and yet they seem content.
Content ! why my old uncle, Richard Dodd,
He worked till he was naught but skin and bone,
And rheumatism : and when the doctor told him :
“ You must give up. It’s no use ; you’re past work.”
“ Past work,” he says, “ past work, like an old horse :
“ They shoot old nags, when they are past their work.
“ Doctor,” he says, “ I’ll give you five pound down
“ To take that gun, and shoot me like a nag.”
The doctor only laughed, and answered, “ Nay.”
“ An old nag’s carcass is worth money, Richard :
“ But yours, why, who’d give anything for yours ! ”
They call me daft—Daft Dick. It pleases them.
But I have never been daft enough to work.
I never did a hand’s turn in my life :
And won’t, while there are trout-streams left, and women
And I am a traveller, too, I cannot rest.
The wind’s in my bones, I think, and like the wind,
I’m here, to-night ; to-morrow, Lord knows where !

Tramp: London, perhaps, or well upon the road there,
Since I'm on Bloodybush Edge.

Dick : Nay, never London.
I cannot thole the towns. They stifle me.

I spent a black day in Newcastle once.
Never again ! I cannot abide the crowds.
I must be by myself. I must have air :
I must have room to breathe, and elbow-room,
Wide spaces round me, winds and running water.
I know the singing-note of every burn
'Twixt here and High Cup Nick, by Appleby.
And birds and beasts, I must have them about me :
Rabbits and hares, weasels and stoats and adders,
Plover and grouse, partridge and snipe and curlew,
Red-shank and heron. I think that towns would choke me ;
And I'd go blind shut in by the tall houses,
With never a far sight to stretch my eyes.
I must have hills, and hills beyond. And beds—
I never held with beds and stuffiness.
I'm seldom at my ease beneath a roof :
The rafters all seem crushing on my head,
A dead weight. Though I sleep in barns in Winter,
I'm never at home except beneath the stars.
I've seen enough of towns ; and as for the women,
Fat blowsy sluts and slatterns. . . .

Tramp :

Easy, Old Cock !

"What's one man's meat . . ." as the saying is ; and so.
Each man to his own world, and his own women.

*(They sit for awhile smoking in silence. Then Daft Dick begins
singing softly to himself again.)*

Dick : (singing)

"Their horses were the wrong way shod,
And Hobbie has mounted his grey sae fine,
Wat on his old horse, Jock on his bay ;

And on they rode for the waters of Tyne.

“ And when they came to Chollerton Ford,
They lighted down by the light o’ the moon ;
And a tree they cut with nogs on each side,
To climb up the wa’ of Newcastle toun.”

Tramp : What’s that you’re singing, matey ?

Dick : “ Jock o’ the Side.”

A ballad of the days when men were men,
And sheep were sheep, and not all mixter-maxter.
Thon were brave days, or brave nights, rather, thon !
Brave nights, when Liddisdale was Liddisdale,
And Tynedale, Tynedale, not all hand-in-glove,
And hanky-panky, and naught but market-haggling
Twixt men whose fathers’ swords were the bargainers !
That was a man’s work, riding out, hot-trod,
Over the hills to lift a herd of cattle,
And leave behind a blazing byre, or to steal
Your neighbour’s sheep, while he lay drunk and snoring—
A man’s work, ever bringing a man’s wages,
The fight to the death, or life won at the sword’s point.
God ! those were nights : the heather and sky alow
With the light of burning peel-towers, and the wind
Ringing with slogans, as the dalesmen met.
Over the singing of the swords :
“ An Armstrong ! An Armstrong ! ”
“ A Milburne ! A Milburne ! ”
“ An Elliott ! An Elliott ! ”
“ A Robson ! A Robson ! ”
“ A Charlton ! A Charlton ! ”
“ A Fenwick ! A Fenwick ! ”

"Fy, Tynedale, to it!"

"Jethert's here! Jethert's here!"

"Tarset and Tarretburn!

"Hardy and heatherbred!

"Yet! Yet!"

Man, did you ever hear the story told
Of Barty Milburne, Barty of the Comb,
Down Tarset way? and how he waked one morning
To find that overnight some Scottish reiver
Had lifted the pick of his flock: and how hot-foot
He was up the Blackburn, summoning Corbet Jock:
And how the two set out to track the thieves
By Emblehope, Berrymoor Edge and Blackman's Law,
By Blakehope Nick, and under Oh Me Edge,
And over Girdle Fell to Chattlehope Spout,
And so to Carter Bar; but lost the trail
Somewhere about the Reidswire: and how, being loth
To go home empty-handed, they just lifted
The best sheep grazing on the Scottish side,
As fair exchange: and turned their faces home.
By this, snow had set in: and 'twas sore work
Driving the wethers against it over the fell;
When, finding they were followed in their turn
By the laird of Leatham and his son, they laughed,
And waited for the Scots by Chattlehope Spout
Above Catcleugh: and in the snow they fought,
Till Corbet Jock and one of the Scots were killed,
And Barty himself sore wounded in the thigh;
When the other Scot, thinking him good as dead,
Sprang on him, as he stooped, with a whickering laugh:

And Barty, with one clean, back-handed blow,
Struck off his head, and, as they tell the tale,
"Garred it spang like an onion along the heather."
Then, picking up the body of Corbet Jock,
He slung it over his shoulder; and carried his mate
With wounded thigh, and driving the wethers before him
Through blinding snow, across the boggy fells
To the Blackburn, though his boot was filled with blood.
Or the other tale, how one of the Robson lads
Stole a Scot's ewes: and when he'd got them home,
And had mixed them with his own, found out, too late,
They'd got the scab: and how he went straight back
With a stout hempen rope to the Scot's house,
And hanged him from his own roof tree by the neck
Till he was dead, to teach the rascal a lesson,
Or so he said, that when a gentleman called
For sheep the next time, he'd think twice about it
Before he tried to palm off scabbit ewes.
Poachers and housebreakers and bargainers!
Those men were men: and lived and died like men;
Taking their own road—asking no man's leave;
Doing and speaking outright, hot and clean,
The thing that burned in them, and paying the price.
And those same gawky, rawboned women mothered
Such sons as these; and still do, nowadays—
For hunting foxes, and for market-haggling!
You fear no living man! A glinting bullseye
Down a dark lane would not have set them scuttling
They didn't dread the mosshags in the dark.
And seemingly they'd little fear of ghosts,
Being themselves so free in making ghosts.

Ghosts! why the night is all alive with ghosts,
Ghosts of dead raiders, and dead cattle-lifters;
Poor, headless ghosts; and ghosts with broken necks . . .
See that chap, yonder, with the bleeding thigh,
On a grey gelding, making for Hucklewinter—
A horse-thief, sure . . . And the ghostly stallions whinney
As the ghostly reivers drive their flocks and herds . . .

(listening)

They are quiet now: but I've often heard the patter
Of sheep, or the trot-trot of the frightened stirks
Down this same road . . .

Tramp: Stop man! You'll drive me crazy!
Let's talk no more of ghosts! I want to sleep.
I'm dog-tired. . . but I'll never sleep to-night.
What's that . . . I thought I heard . . . I'm all a-tremble.
My very blood stops, listening, in my veins.
I'm all to fiddlestrings . . . Let's talk of London.
And lights, and crowds, and women. Once I met
A chap in the bar of The World Turned Upside Down,
With three blue snakes tattooed around his wrist:
A joker, he was; and what he didn't know
Of women the world over you could shove
Between the nail and the quick, and never feel it.
He told me that in Valparaiso once
A half-breed wench that he . . . but, Lord, what's that!
(A low distant sound of trotting drawing quickly nearer).
I thought I heard . . . Do you hear nothing?

Dick:

Naught.

Tramp: I'm all on edge; I could have sworn I heard—

Where was I? Well, as I was saying . . . God!
Can you hear nothing now? Trot-trot! Trot-trot!
I must be going crazed, or you're stone deaf.

Dick: Nay, I'm none deaf

Tramp: It's coming nearer, nearer . . .
Trot-trot! trot-trot! Man, tell me that you hear it,
For God's sake, or I'll go mad!

Dick: No two men ever
May hear or see them, together, at one time.

Tramp: Hear what? See what? Speak, man, if you've a tongue!

Dick: The ghostly stirks.

Tramp (starting up): The ghostly stirks! Trot-trot!
Trot-trot! They're almost on us. Look you! there!
Along the road there, black against the sky.

They're charging down with eyes ablaze . . . O Christ . . .

(He takes to his heels, running lamely down the road on the Scottish side, as a herd of frightened young stirks gallops down the road from the English side. They pass Dick, who watches them, placidly smoking, until they are by, when, taking his pipe from his mouth, he gives a blood-curdling whoop, which sends them scampering more wildly after the tramp. Presently the cattle-drover, panting and limping half-a-mile behind his herd, comes down the road. Seeing Dick, he stops.)

Drover: Have any beasts come by? Lord, what a dance
They've led me, since we quitted Bellingham!
I've chased them over half the countryside!

Dick: Aye: they were making straight for Dinlabyre.

Drover: Then I can rest. They cannot go far wrong now.
We're for Saughtree; and I'm fair hattered, and they
Can't have the spunk left in them to stray far.

They'll be all right.

Dick : Aye ! and your brother's with them.

Drover : Brother ? I have no brother . . .

Dick : Well, he and you
Are as like as peas—a pair of gallows-birds.
And he was driving them, and walloping them . . .

Drover (starting to run) : Good God ! Just wait till I catch up
with him !

Dick (calling after him) : It will take you all your time, and more,
to catch him.

(To himself).

Now, I can sleep in peace, without bedfellows.
Two in a bed is one too many for me—
And such a clatter-jaw !

Not with vain tears, when we're beyond the sun,
We'll beat on the substantial doors, nor tread
Those dusty high-roads of the aimless dead
Plaintive for Earth ; but rather turn and run
Down some close-covered by-way of the air,
Some low sweet alley between wind and wind,
Stoop under faint gleams, thread the shadows, find
Some whispering ghost-forgotten nook, and there
Spend in pure converse our eternal day ;
Think each in each, immediately wise ;
Learn all we lacked before ; hear, know, and say
What this tumultuous body now denies ;
And feel, who have laid our groping hands away ;
And see, no longer blinded by our eyes.

Somewhile before the dawn I rose, and stept
Softly along the dim way to your room,
And found you sleeping in the quiet gloom,
And holiness about you as you slept.
I knelt there ; till your waking fingers crept
About my head, and held it. I had rest
Unhoped this side of Heaven, beneath your breast.
I knelt a long time, still ; nor even wept.

It was great wrong you did me ; and for gain
Of that poor moment's kindliness, and ease,
And sleepy mother-comfort !

Child, you know
How easily love leaps out to dreams like these,
Who has seen them true. And love that's wakened so
Takes all too long to lay asleep again.

WAIKIKI.

October, 1913.

To-day I have been happy. All the day
I held the memory of you, and wove
Its laughter with the dancing light o' the spray,
And sowed the sky with tiny clouds of love,
And sent you following the white waves of sea,
And crowned your head with fancies, nothing worth,
Stray buds from that old dust of misery,
Being glad with a new foolish quiet mirth.

So lightly I played with those dark memories,
Just as a child, beneath the summer skies,
Plays hour by hour with a strange shining stone,
For which (he knows not) towns were fire of old,
And love has been betrayed, and murder done,
And great kings turned to a little bitter mould.

THE PACIFIC.

October, 1913.

They say there's a high windless world and strange,
Out of the wash of days and temporal tide,
Where Faith and Good, Wisdom and Truth abide,
Aeterna corpora, subject to no change.

There the sure suns of these pale shadows move ;
There stand the immortal ensigns of our war ;
Our melting flesh fixed Beauty there, a star,
And perishing hearts, imperishable Love

Dear, we know only that we sigh, kiss, smile ;
Each kiss lasts but the kissing ; and grief goes over ;
Love has no habitation but the heart.
Poor straws ! on the dark flood we catch awhile,
Cling, and are borne into the night apart.
The laugh dies with the lips, " Love " with the lover.

South Kensington—Makaweli,

1913.

It is in Crete, a many years ago :
Under a peak that strained in icy stone
To thrust an endless gesture at the stars.

Two peasants, son and mother, in their hut
Were talking : mouth close against ear they talkt,
Because a great storm poured over the hut
A sound of rain, driven so hard it smackt
Against the walls like pebbles thrown in volleys ;
And, carrying this, a rushing sound of wind
That fled through woods, tearing itself, and blew
Across the mountain piled above the hut,
Making the rocky hollows and ravines
Snore like monstrous jars in its pauseless breath.

Yet it was time for pleasant days. The earth—
All winter long since dried in her, and death
Searcht out and crumbled in the ground by frost—
Waited for spring to burn her once again,
Ready as tinder is for touch of fire
To thrill its tranced nature and unseal
The striving self-creative will of flame.
Yea, full time now for the woods to toss their flame,
Burning with every green that water knows :
From the green gold of oaks, like mounded waves
In green mid-sea full of a golden gleam,
To birches like the quiet depth beside
Sheer downward cliffs, where shallow light of green
Is mixt with blue from under. And already
Flowers began to hire the wings of bees
At a delicious wage to carry love,
Their golden trade, to far off unknown mates.

But the storm came, and with its wind trod out,
And drencht with its rain, the spring's sweet travelling fire.

Not heeding the loud air, these peasants talkt.

Son : But 'tis a trade despised.

Mother : By tongues that go
Like tails of cows in summer, flicking the clegs :
They flourish their lithe talk in the air, to switch
The flies of jealousy that so prick their minds.
Is it despised ? Look you, is man a beast,
Or is he man ?

Son : He's man till he's a corpse ;
And then he should be filth ; and scorn's the thing
For those whose trade is dabbling among filth.

Mother : The kitten miaows his scorn ! But think on it,
That you'd be nothing of the handsome man
You take yourself to be—you'd be a lump
Of worse than dung—dabble your thought in that !—
If I'd not had my trade and fed you on it.

Son : I know all this. But what I mean to say—
I am grown now to work for both of us,
And leave corpse-tending be.

Mother : No gain in that,
And loss a plenty. You've a name abroad
For your strong work, Milon himself no better.
And I've my name for setting corpses right ;
As much to me as any feats to you.

Son : My name's honest : it's queer you love your scorn.

Mother : Is man a beast, I say, or is he man ?
And what is most the man in him ? 'Tis pride.

And go through all his uses, you'll not see
His pride standing taller and more daring
Than in my trade. Naught lives but must lie down
Helpless, and fastened in a tomb must let
The earth at her detestable slow pleasure
Meddle with what was once so much delight.
Well, shall man go to his disgrace like beasts
All in a desperate huddle? Not he; he'll go
A neat corpse, a polite death. While he holds
The shape of man, he will have decent pride
About the shape. And 'tis from me he has it.
I, the scorn'd crone, who stretches out dead men,
(But the boys daren't halloo me!) I think myself
Like a worn twisted shell the tide has beacht
Where man may find it, marred with an age of journey
Under the sea, and ruffian'd by the stones;
But if he set his purposed lips against
That knockt shell's breakage, he can make it sound
A booming call, will thunder down the surf.
And so his brave breath uses me; he sends
Through my lame toil his purpose to be man
And his own reverence past the great stound of death,
Announcing it even to his own corruption.

Son : You make it out a fine thing. But I'm sure
'Tis a vile business you were best be quit of.

Mother : Truly I like my corpses, and the way
I make death prouder sign of man than life.
I like to watch, with hiding of my smiles,
The mourners making much of themselves with grief,
Howling themselves into their neighbours' notice;

And I the while knowing myself alone
The mind that has allowed their ceremony,
That caught death up out of wretchedly being
And asham'd riddance of poor carrion lumber.
And sometimes I will eat their sins, poor fools :
'Twere pity if I made the look of death
Dignity sleeping sound, and left the spirit
A writhen thing, mean with a useless fear.

Son : It is because they set you down so low,
You the straker of corpses, they can bear
To think of you defiled by death without,
Defiled within by meals of their rank evil.

Mother : Let them be thinking ; they give me their sins
Like children laying pranks of mischief on
Their kindly nurse, who smiles to bear the blame.

As speech will drop from those who talk in quiet,
Because a sudden blow of dinning noise
Falls there, and leaves the silence like stunn'd thought,
But ringing like a breadth of metal : so
These, who here talkt in an unheeded rage
Of noise, were startled dumb because there smote
Upon the steady roar of hurlying air
About them, huge and heavy and swift silence
Down like the shock of hammer. No smallest whine
Of sound moved under it, all so instantly
The night was tyrannized, though in their brains
The breakers of the wind were shouting still.
And their amazement had not nerved their tongues
To venture stir of speech in the grave quiet,
Before the door rattled, and an old man

Came in, limping, hideous, crooked with age.
Unshod his feet, but in foul gear of mud,
And tatter'd shame were all his clothes. He stood
And bleared upon the candle, stoopt and gaping.
Upon his wiry trembling neck pusht out,
The weight of his head was poised like a baboon's ;
And the draught played with his spare goatish beard.
From pucker'd clefts as red as wounds his eyes
Lookt weeping ; but the bone of his brow and face,
Though peering horribly through the stretcht and scorcht
Mask of his tann'd age, was framed to hold
The governance and decree of mighty spirit,
Superb above control of common fate,
Before this ponderous disease of years
Had clung about it. For a striving while
Some still unmastered royalty in him
Would right the toughen'd warping of his spine ;
But could not. Then he spoke. His voice,
Clear strength with feeble harshness jarring through it,
Was like a trumpet when the brass is flawed ;
So nobly in the hollows of his skull
'The sound was muster'd, but began from strings
So slack and fretted, and with rheum so hinder'd.

“ O Cretans, he is dead ! ”

He stumbled back,
And then came burdened in again ; he bore
Lapt in a goatskin bundle some small weight
A boy would swing in single-handed play ;
But he with strains and age's gasping grumble
Workt hard to be its porter. Up to the bench

He sidled, backt against it, bent his knees,
And with a grunt he let his parcel slide
Down the hunch of his shoulders. Then to his hosts
He turned, with dropt jaw quivering, eyebrows up
High-pitcht in anxious bridges over their sockets ;
And from the thrust of them the curving horror
Pusht his forehead rugged up to his pate
In creases of bald skin ; like the half-rounds
Of ripples pusht backward by a buttress
Against a steady stream. He faced them so,
All signed with the absurd deformity
The labour of grief must be content to earn
When it is working for life pincht in age.
And leaning over the small thing that lay
Wrapt up before him, at last he spoke again.

Old Man : He is dead now, and you must be with me
In burying him.

Mother : A baby ! And by your speech
You're some outlandish vagabond. It will be
You've made some demon happy with the blood
And burnt fat of the bairn ; ay, it has been
Some wizard's murder, I'll be bound. And now
It's I must get you quit of your pitiful rubbish !
But you are wrong there.

Son : You go too hard upon him.
Look how his mind stares from his ancient face,
Posed to make out your wording, what it means.
He's honest, sure, and brings no harm in him.

Mother : What, an old shabby man who tramps abroad
In a fiends' holiday of a storm, and brings

Lapt up strangely and slung on his wicked back
A dead baby ! I warrant, he deals in them ;
He is a sorcerers' monger. I would know
More of him, if he wants my skill. And the wind,
When he came in, fell down from noising aloft,
Headlong down as a drunk man falls, who runs
Blind and shouting over a cliff : belike
That means some wicked league goes faithful with him.—
Whose is this baby ? Have you strangled it ?

Son : The grasp, see, of those wavering hands would scarce
Strangle a worm.

Old Man : You said the wind had fallen ?
Yes, surely it would : I should have noted it.
Indeed, they would call it off, whistle it back
To kennel, now it has worried him to death.
I pickt him up, and bore him in my arms
Hither, soon as I knew he was to die.
But that fierce hound of a storm was after us
All my stumbling way ; it tore at him,
And with a hundred dreadful snatching jaws
Would jerk him from the fold of my trembling arms
Where he lay snuggled, whimpering to be safe.
And terror at last of all that hatred yelling
Into his face and biting at his limbs
Forced death upon him ; he was so weak, so weak ;
Breath could not live in such a shaken body.
So it is ended now ; now he is yours
To wash and bury : and will you eat his sins ?

Mother : An easy mouthful that, poor bairn ! Ay, sad
To think of all the lusty cheerful sins

He might have played with, but for that killjoy death.
O I will eat his sins : I've had my meals
Of rapes, murders, and jeering at the gods,
And never known them quarrel with me yet,
Not even saying a twinge of colic against me.
Ay, baby ! your little secret spawn of sins
Will make no bother for my heart : soft roe
Were tastier, but not milder in my belly.
Look, sir ; this is the trick we use.—
Boy, be stirring, undo the poor wee brat.

She took a crust, sopt it and salted it,
And gave it to the crouching man ; and he
Over the bundled thing upon the bench
Handed the morsel back. She muncht it down,
Then turned to bustle with her needs, and get
Her skill in order for the laying out.
Truly she was unwilling ; but their minds
Thrilled strangely in the look of his tarnisht eyes,
That sent invisibly burning rays among
Their pierced thoughts, and gathered them to shape
The act of his desire, like powder'd iron
Drawn into pattern of a magnet's force.

Yet as she turned from bolting down that crust
Her casual rite had made bitter as tears,
A sign for the reproach of sin, his face
Went blank with timid wonder, in its stare
After her busily searching corners and cupboards ;
Like an old puzzled ploughman at a fair,
Who gapes after a juggling tightrope dancer,
Seeing him, when his risky show is done,

Push unconcerned and whistling through the crowd :
So he was looking, as it were dreadfully strange
She made so little of those eaten sins.

Meanwhile, she ferreting for cloths and pans,
And the ancient traveller lost in his feckless gaze,
The son was fingering the feeble knots
That kept the stranger's baggage,—very loath
To pluck the ragged hide unfastened, yet
He could not fumble there for long, so slack
And such a foolish work the tying was.

A stealing cat, left in a room alone
Where supper's on the table, smelling out
A dram of milk low down in a narrow jug ;
Careful not to be noisy and not to spill,
Her dainty paw dips in and soaks her fur,
Then daintily draws out again and licks
The dripping theft. Even so gingerly
Into the bundle's folds his hand went loosening.

She heard, the mother bustling with her things,
Suddenly heard, from where she left her son,
Such a harsh gasp of forced desperate breath
As comes from lungs coopt in hard agony
Of terror, muscles clencht about the bones
Like a red-hot tyre that shrinks on a smoking wheel.
She turned, and saw her boy in palsy, his arms
Fixt half-way raised, and eyes that could not wink
But only glare into the opened pack.
She scurried to him ; and a grim thing lay
For her to see ; no baby, but a man
Unbelievably withered into age,

The cinder of a man, parcht and blasted
To smallness like a baby, puny and dried,
His body all drawn up into a fist ;
The pined legs, crooked as burnt candle-wicks,
So taut with perisht sinews that their knees
Thrusted the shrivelled belly ; and his arms
Hugg'd his chest with little graspless hands.
Brown as though age had scorcht like fire at last
And full of creases was the ancient skin.
But nothing babyish was the wasted head
Thrawn on his chest (and bigger than his chest
The great head seemed) : the sharpened edge of jaws,
With thin beard scanted to a crisp grey wool ;
The lean nose peaking like a puffin's bill ;
And brow and brainpan smooth as it were wrought wood,
But vaulted for a god's imagination.

Horreur was feasted in their minds. But he,
The wretch who brought with him that dreadful luggage,
Still lookt towards where the woman had been busy,
Moveless but for the bent knees shivering,
A standing swoon, empty of all but sorrow.
They turned on him ; the life in them broke loose
From pausing aghast, and clamoured like a stream
Bursting a weir : the son threaten'd, and she
Wrung his shoulder and spoke in angry fear :
" Leave off your doating, you monstrous old man ;
What's this you've brought us ? " Then again he tried
To brave the burden of his years and stand
Upright before their question ; and again
He summoned from his wreck of royal life
Commanding voice : it came broken and crippled

To serve him, and five words were toil enough
Now for the voice of his greatness to endure
Before it fainted :

“ Zeus ! It is Father Zeus ! ”

Grief seemed to clench his body. Down he fell
From difficult stature and lay crouching there
As low as worship before these poor folk ;
And from the heap came shaken whispering :
“ The thundering Zeus ! His favour was the prayer
Of gods and men, his sentence was their lives.
Now he is that small twisted husk ; and I,
This halt misery of perishing age,
I am Apollo, I am Apollo ! ”

A long while, sobbing and with shrill breath, he lay ;
At last, his head a little sideways turned,
He told his tale, in voice all dwindled small
To husky twittering, a hissing whine
That sometimes went into a peewit-squeak :
Like to the rustling drag of a fray'd rope
Over a pulley creaking in its rust,
When he that hauls is tired and often waits.

Apollo : We were upon the mountainous Height of the gods
That has the whole world under it ; and thence—
Like mountain-water feeding the fuming seas—
Divine life down from our lofty quiet streamed,
Down where the tides of men were labouring
In hollow earth, and rolling to and fro
Their floods of brackish fortune : into the depths
Of all that living brine we poured our power,
Fresh heavenly water sweetening the vast salt,

A shining song into the helpless roaring.

But lately there had seemed some growth of change
To hold the speed and plenty of our gift :
As on the flanks of ancient naked stone
Ages of water grind sheer rock to soil,
And soil at last grows into moss and weed,
Till falling water soaks the whole hillside
And drips from ledge to ledge of sodden turf.
And to our sight, scanning the scope of time
Easily as the distance of the earth,
Appeared, behind the haze of things to come,
Enormity, disaster crouching low,
Like darkness charged with fire—the far-off sleep
Of ruinous purpose, dreaming itself awake
In dreams that made the dark drowse suddenly blaze.

We glanced at it as feasted men will look
At lightning, when the storm is so far off
The winking glare burns noiseless as the stars
Along the rim of pale sweet summer-dark,
Giving a moment's shadow to the trees.
Or if fear toucht our hearts, it was as light
As tickling threads of spider-work will touch
The face of one who loiters in the evening.

We knew how the whole drift of living world
Lies in the nets of laws, that hoist and drag
Their booty of Existence out of depths
Unknown to land it dying none knows where.
But, for the ages while that cast is drawing,
We thought the pressure of its grasp would fall
Upon us through our element as mild

As light, the sun's command, shines through a pool
Of rippled water, and rules with quivering gleam
The sand that sleeps beneath in golden nets.

Certain, within the world's slow draught, our keep
Stood mountainous above the tides of men ;
And they, in surge against its sightless prow
Of anchor'd stone, were spent about the huge
Foundations of our fate, and backward failed
Into surrendering spray from rearing towards us.

Zeus the Father assembled us, and spoke :
" It has been known, that from some other source
Than our divinely streaming mountain, men
Have tempered the old brine of mortal souls.
Gods like a wandering rain have plenisht them
With sweetness, when perhaps our gift was stayed :
Bacchus we found descended among men
Out of the flying winds of shapeless spirit,
Dying into them like a rain at sea,
Shedding divine fresh water of his life
Over their salty torrent, and again
From out the depths of them rising a ghost
Pure of the bitter earth they have dissolved,
Again to pour on them immortal moods.
We treated with him to dwell here, to take
A heavenly name, and to be Dionysus.
So we did well, and he."

We turned to smile
Brotherly pleasure on our lovely guest.
He was not in his place ; he was not found
In heaven that day, the last of heaven's days.
Where had he gone, our belov'd Dionysus?

The Father spoke again : " On the low earth
Now in a patch of men another god
Appears. Despise him not, Olympian gods !
Him too we will persuade into our manner ;
What has been once well done, may be again."

So to mankind we bent. Our gaze devoured
The height that made the press of flocking lives
Molten in one vague to-and-fro of sea ;
Our eager sense closed with the life of man,
Till the whole sight of it roaming the earth
In single swaying flow, one driven tide,
Crumbled into passionate wilful men
Innumerosly seen, in separate hastes
Wrangling their groping purposes. We found
Amid the ruffle of confused small errands,
That moil of jarring wills, a piece of earth
Where all the crossing lives seemed to be stroked
Into one pause of strain'd wondering order
By ruling passage of some great event ;
As when there have been floods upon the fields,
The matted twigs and straws of broken woods
Lie combed and laid and handled by the water,
All packt one way. So these lives, massed and straighten'd,
Were held from their loose custom in a firm
Intent, towards where they had three of their kind
Hung up on gallows crosses. Bleak they spiked
In twilight against splendid cloudy flames
Of scarlet evening. It was a low bare mound
That thrust these cruelties up at the sky,
So that it seemed the half-nave, and the poles
The jutting spokes, of a great ruin'd wheel

Sunk to the axle in the fens of life.
But in the heaven behind it, the sun's rays
Were like a wheel of white-hot burning gold,
Terrible whirling spokes of spouted fire,
The blazing pillars of a wheel that fled
Over the earth travelling gloriously.

For we had found the stranger god—a god
Hang'd and dying between murderers :
Once more a god kill'd for earthly worship !
His death was while we lookt and said, " He dies,
He dies ! Again it is a god that dies ! "
But in his death this was a mightier god
Than those that died before. There fell on us
At once a frost of horror from above.
Darkness was perfect over us : it was
Time, the immense muster'd power of the whole
Time of the world, stowed in one moment's nature.
The darkness we had seen far off, that was
The mere length of our lucid view in time
Ending as darkness, like to searching light
In a clear depth of water losing itself,—
That darkness of our sight was real now
And triumphing,—vengeance for all the debt
We had not heeded owing, neglected time
Gathered into a single storm that struck
A single fire of all the years till then,
Blasting us instantly into dry age,
But leaving us a while to feel our deaths.
And I saw Zeus, charr'd to that infant posture,
Lie shrunk before me with bound twitching limbs,
With helpless rocking head and puling breath ;

And with the last of my divinity
Set out to nurse him hither, bearing him
To die where he was born, in Crete.

He stopt.

He was so still they thought death had him now,
But kept their stared astonishment unmoved
Upon him. 'Twas not death ; for soon they saw
Shudders in his old body, and his hands work
As they would dig the floor to clutch in it.
The woman stole a pace to see what ailed
His quivering silence ; and she found his eyes
Appalled, reading some terror in the door.
She lookt towards his fear : it was a gleam
That came from the outside darkness, piercing through
The cracks at sill and lintol and the warpt
Parting of the worm'd cross-ledged boards. It shone
More white than any flame or the sun's self,
As white as stars and eager as the sun.
Ever closer and brighter it seemed to come
Against the door, thronging upon it, jetting
Where any seam it found to let it through
Like pressure into the shadowy room. They thought
It must push on the door with torrent force,
Such bursting light came through ; and they were dazed
To see the timber did not shake and give.
And now the door's whole wood was full of light,
As if it had been paper against the glare,
The grain like a fine web of glowing threads.
And of a sudden there was no door, but white
Blinding vacancy, measureless light ;

And in the midst a young man glorious.
He stood among them, lookt at Apollo, and laught.

Apollo : Unhurt, unaged ! Dionysus ! Thou !

Bacchus : Call me no more that name. All Bacchus now
I am, and have nor heavenly name nor nature.

Apollo : I am disguised to thee, Bacchus, I think.

Bacchus : I know you, cripple, easily as I know
That shrivelled rind yonder was Father Zeus.

Apollo : And thou hast mightier divinity !
Else that I take thee with the ashamed new sense
Of this incapable mortality.—
Didst thou desert us, knowing of our doom ?
Where hast thou been ? How art thou grown so radiant,
Escaping our destruction, thriving in it ?

Bacchus : You never understood me in Olympus.
Your ignorant bland friendship grew to me
More tiresome than a fawning fondling love
To one in whom love sickens. You courteous gods !—
What ailed me, siding with that mummy there ?—
Your serene feasts ! And I sitting among you
Parleying with your boasts of immortal reign ;
And this despair of yours chained murderous
In my dark heart, tugging to hunt you down
The slope of heaven to graves in the base earth.
Ay, bury your Zeus, else 'tis a god that stinks !

Apollo : How are you safe, when no Uranian god
But dies, or goes, like me, an idiot palsy ?

Bacchus : For that I am not, though once seated there,
A heavenly god ! And I have lodged among

The gods of hell, those cobwebs in your cellars,
Fine-spun wavering silk of the nether dirt,
And am not hellish either. Know you not,
Now you are doddering, how the vast dead world
Lives, as all death lives, as dead Zeus will live ?

Apollo : Will live ?

Bacchus : In maggots, if such withered stuff
Can rot at all. And as death lives in worms
And points of finer death-dissolving life,
The immense death of the world lives in gods,
Bred in it by decay of unity.
Like gentles with their potent little mouths
Softening stiffen'd death to the broth they need,
You gods workt in the carcase of the world
To melt its obstinate death, and made therein
Powers and laws and fluid obedience.
And quickened so, ye were the life of the world ;
But what comes out of death, death takes again.—
He winces ; and I taunt where I should teach.
I am too cruel : I will shift my likeness,
Making my lesson out of sleep, not death.
For one who sleeps hath in the midst of rest
Busy creation, dreams : they are himself,
His unknown person shaped to image known ;
The many unflagging toils whereby his flesh
Negotiates life, labouring of lungs
And piston-jet of blood and belly's seething—
The rumour of all this out of his body
Shakes in his slumbering brain, and its dull motion
There meets imagination's sleepless art ;

And into phantom event,—sound, hue, and figure—
Is forged familiar to his will's desire ;
And this is dream. Even so in the sleep of the world
Gods are dreams. The great imagining spirit,
That lives sealed fast within the drowzèd world,
Is always toucht by steady obscure turmoil
Out of its own surrounding nature thrilling
Confused and general—the slumbering world's
Labour of being hugely still itself ;
Like humming din that fills the masonry
Of a mill's inmost darkest room. And this,
The murmur of its own substantial life,
The spirit imagines into dream, the life
Of gods : and man is the sleeping spirit's brain,
Where it contrives the fictions of its will.
But there are dreams that shine and move in music
And after vanish ; and there is one dream
That always stays : and I, I am that dream.
For know me now at last !— What is the world
That sleeps so busily around the spirit,
Quickening its restless forgery of dream ?
It is the chance of a seeming-steady whorl
Of motion shaped on infinite pouring depths :
Rapture that is for ever not the world
Caught in a wavering spin, and gone for ever,
The whorl abiding, incessantly supplied
From the unending unbeginning stream.
I am the water of the eddying world :
In me the spirit hath dreamt the ceaseless rush
Of constant being swept through changing manners.

I am a god not apt for heaven and hell ;
Measureless joy and measureless woe, I am
The rapture that is not the world, for ever
Narrowed into the world and thence escaping.
But you, what dreams are you ? What prompts you gods
That live so stately in your heaven and hell,
Order'd delight and bounded grief ?— You are
Naught but the shifty manner of this life,
That shaping eddy which hath made a world
In the abyss of the eternal water.
And who knows not that eddies slide and totter ?
The dream of you—the formal round that keeps
Created the unpurposed nameless passion—
My uncontrollable dream with inroad strange
Hath often shaken ; now it has burnt among you
Withering you all at last. There is naught of you,
There is naught but a new dream of me. How else ?
The shape of the whorl has stirred and changed : the world
Is no more what it was when you were dreamt
Its images. But it is not my hurt,
For I am always dreamt and to be dreamt.

Apollo: But there will be our like again: in gods
The spirit will know again the shapely course
And music of the measured world.

Bacchus : While you,
Timorously haunting there, applaud !
But not if, as I mean, I keep the spirit,
Now I have all its sway, amazed in long
Thrilling dream of incredible desire
Forsaking still its momentary round

Of measure in the world, a god of hope
That anguishes for flight beyond all nature.
And let the new gods come. They cannot stay ;
I shall be in among them, and shall bid
Farewell to their fleeting heaven, when once again
The circling world shifts into some new shape.
Ay, even as now— Farewell, shall I say ?
Fare as ye may, dead god and dying god !

He spoke and laught again and was not there.
The glimmering room came back about them like
The blackness of a cavern ; and they stood still.
At last that old Apollo, without words,
Bade their blank minds be his. The woman washt
And dried the crumpled wreck of Zeus ; her son
Gathered it in the goatskin to his breast ;
And in the quiet night the three went out
To climb the Cretan mountain. " Haste ! Before
I see the sun, bring me and my business
To the last height of the peak " : so the god's thought
Workt in their minds and drove them. Misty dawn
Was known already by the crags, called forth
To watch each other in their lonely frosts
Enduring still, while all the bottom earth
They seemed to suffer for slept in its cloud.
These peasants and the god at length had climbed
The top of Crete ; and, like a common task,
To throw aside the loosen'd weather'd stones
The son bent down, scooping a shallow hole,
The grave of Zeus ; and there the panting woman
Laid in its package the Olympian corpse.

Apollo spoke to them across the grave.

Apollo : True is, I am cut off ; true what he said,
Bacchus refresht in splendour when we die down ;
For our occasion fails from under us.
The cliffs of the mountains in this cloudy light
Seem lifted free from their low ground, the earth
Now voided and annulled which bore them up
Like sublime faculties : in perfected height
Of patience and hard honour amid fate,
They seem, for their own ceaseless glee alone,
Left here in bright erect self-maintenance
Arduous. So may it not be with the gods,
Since with the gods, whatever seems is truth :
It was our glory ; now it is our death.
For now hath clouded change come in between
The earthly life and us ; our far-off ground
Seems blotted from beneath us, though it is there.
But 'tis enough that it so seem : we crumble,
We are left insupportable, ruining.
You look your last upon the broken gods.
Bacchus remains, I know not what new Bacchus
Guising his everlasting deity.
Will he content you ? Will you love for long
To serve him with a scorn of shapely law,
Of bounded measured life under the stars ?
At last will you not know his godhead is
The vengeance of the uncreated passion
On that which holds it in creation, you,
The living world ? And a delicate vengeance !
“Deny the seeming beauty of the world,

Follow me out of seeming ! ” This is the cry.
How long before whatever seems become
Olympian truth again ? How long shall be
The glory of your world reckon'd its shame ?—
You minds that seize the rage of infinite force
And master it to seem desirable,
A firm and shining world, you take a god
Who turns your triumph to a meddling sin,
And holds you contrite for it ! Ay, say it pours,
That formless race of being, pours through you
The real and eternal of your lives :
Have this sheer being for your god, you make
Worthless yourselves, worthless to be the world.
But all the measured fires that fill the sky
Rejoicing in their glittering certainty,
The times of earth, and waters in their rounds,
And your own shapely thought—all this that is
Seeming and mortal—this is your mastery !—
The seizure into boundaries of beauty
That overcomes the eternity in you.
Make this your god, and life is its own value.
Will you have life once more that loves itself ?
Then of the world shaped into radiant seeming
In midst of flux, let there be Zeus again ;
Yea, and another son of Zeus, a new
Apollo, god of the life that knows itself
Made of eternal being, but made with power
To shape the eternal into mortal world.

So prophesying was the end of him.
His wretched figure sunk to crooked kneeling ;

His mouth gaped as he would be speaking still,
But only choked ; with jerks of throttling grip
He laid hold on his windpipe like self-murder ;
And then he bowed his head, and tumbled down
Beside that other. Quickly the peasants moved,
Released from him, but not yet from his fear,
To load his death, piling a cairn of boulders.

Back in their hut, son and mother no word
Had for each other a long while. At last
The woman, stirring about dinner, spoke :
" Boy, you shall have your way. From to-day on
Let no one come to me for washing corpses."

If I should take
Less thought of gentleness
For your dear sake
Than for the poignant labours that possess
My blood, then surely by so much were signed
My shame and loss in the world's recording mind.

If you should be
Jealous of my desire,
And, loving me,
Rebuke my patient hopes from your sweet fire,
Then would you take a lover to your bed
Abased with the pale submission of the dead.

Of old men wrought strange gods for mystery,
 Implored miraculous tokens in the skies,
And lips that most were strange in prophecy
 Were most accounted wise.

The hearthstone's commerce between mate and mate,
 Barren of wonder, prospered in content,
And still the hunger of their thought was great
 For sweet astonishment.

And so they built them altars of retreat
 Where life's familiar use was overthrown,
And left the shining world world about their feet,
 To travel worlds unknown.

* * * *

We hunger still. But wonder has come down
 From alien skies upon the midst of us ;
The sparkling hedgerow and the clamorous town
 Have grown miraculous.

And man from his far travelling returns
 To find yet stranger wisdom than he sought,
Where in the habit of his threshold burns
 Unfathomable thought.

Although beyond the track of unseen stars
Imagination strove in weariless might,
Yet loomed at last inviolable bars
That bound my farthest flight.

And when some plain old carol in the street
Quickened a shining angel in my brain,
I knew that even his passionate wings should beat
Upon those bars in vain.

And then I asked if God omnipotent
Himself was caught within the snare, or free,
And would the bars at his command relent.—
And none could answer me.

Beyond my window in the night
Is but a drab inglorious street,
Yet there the frost and clean starlight
As over Warwick woods are sweet.

Under the grey drift of the town
The crocus works among the mould
As eagerly as those that crown
The Warwick spring in flame and gold.

And when the tramway down the hill
Across the cobbles moans and rings,
There is about my window-sill
The tumult of a thousand wings.

One told me in the stress of days
Of ease that memory should bring,
And so I feared my trodden ways
For snares against my labouring.

Lest I should spend my brain amiss
In wrath for bitterness gone by,
Or amorous for some old kiss,
I would not deal with memory.

Because one said—' In memory
Is half the health of your estate,'
I smote the dead years under me,
I smote, and cast them from my gate.

(To E.M.)

PERSONS.

*HUFF, the Farmer.**SHALE, the Labourer.**SOLLERS, the Wainwright.**A DOWSER.**MERRICK, the Smith.**Mrs. HUFF.**VINE, the Publican.**WARP, the Molecatcher.**Men and Women of the Village.*

ACT I.

Scene ; A Public House kitchen. HUFF the Farmer and SOLLERS the Wainwright talking ; another man, a stranger, sitting silent.

Huff : Ay, you may think we're well off—

Sollers : Now for croaks !

Old toad ! who's trodden on you now ?—Go on ;

But if you can, croak us a new tune.

Huff : Ay,

You think you're well off—and don't grab my words

Before they're spoken—but some folks, I've heard,

Pity us, living quiet in the valley.

Sollers : Well, I suppose 'tis their affair.

Huff : Is it ?

But what I mean to say,—if they think small

Of us that live in the valley, mayn't it show

That we aren't all so happy as we think ?

MERRICK the Smith comes in.

Merrick : Quick, cider ! I believe I've swallowed a coal.

Sollers : Good evening. True, the heat's a wonder to-night.

[Smith draws himself cider.]

Huff: Haven't you brought your flute? We've all got room
For music in our minds to-night, I'll swear.
Working all day in the sun do seem to push
The thought out of your brain.

Sollers: O, 'tis the sun
Has trodden on you? That's what makes you croak?
Ay, whistle him somewhat: put a tune in his brain;
He'll else croak us out of pleasure with drinking.

Merrick: 'Tis quenching, I believe.—A tune? Too hot.
You want a fiddler.

Huff: Nay, I want your flute.
I like a piping sound, not scraping o' guts.

Merrick: This is no weather for a man to play
Flutes or music at all that asks him spend
His breath and spittle: you want both yourself
These oven days. Wait till a fiddler comes.

Huff: Who ever comes down here?

Sollers: There's someone come.

[*Pointing with his pipe to the stranger.*]

Merrick: Good evening, mister. Are you a man for tunes?

Stranger: And if I was, I'd give you none to-night.

Merrick: Well, no offence: there's no offence, I hope,
In taking a dummy for a tuneful man.
Is it for can't or won't you are?

Stranger: You wouldn't, if you carried in your mind
What I've been carrying all day.

Sollers: What's that?

Stranger: You wait; you'll know about it soon; O yes,
Soon enough it will find you out and rouse you.

Huff: Now ain't that just the way we go down here?

Here in the valley we're like dogs in a yard,
Chained to our kennels and wall'd in all round,
And not a sound of the world jumps over our hills.
And when there comes a passenger among us,
One who has heard what's stirring out beyond,
'Tis a grutchy mumchance fellow in the dismals !

Stranger : News, is it, you want ? I could give you news !—
I wonder, did you ever hate to feel
The earth so fine and splendid ?

Huff : O, you're one
Has stood in the brunt of the world's wickedness,
Like me ? But listen, and I'll give you a tale
Of wicked things done in this little valley,
Done against me, will surely make you think
The Devil here fetcht up his masterpiece.

Sollers : Ah, but it's hot enough without you talking
Your old hell fire about that pair of sinners.
Leave them alone and drink.

Huff : I'll smell them grilling
One of these days.

Merrick : But there'll be nought to drink
When that begins ! Best keep your skin full now.

Stranger : What do I care for wickedness ? Let those
Who've played with dirt, and thought the game was bold,
Make much of it while they can : there's a big thing
Coming down to us, ay, well on it's road,
Will make their ploys seem mighty piddling sport.

Huff : This is a fool ; or else it's what I think,—
The world now breeds such crowd that they've no room
For well grown sins : they hatch 'em small as flies.

But you stay here, out of the world awhile,
Here where a man's mind, and a woman's mind,
Can fling out large in wickedness: you'll see
Something monstrous here, something dreadful.

Stranger : I've seen enough of that. Though it was only
Fancying made me see it, it was enough :
I've seen the folk of the world yelling aghast,
Scurrying to hide themselves. I want nought else
Monstrous and dreadful.—

Merrick : What had roused 'em so ?
Some house afire ?

Huff: A huzzy flogged to death
For her hard-faced adultery?

Stranger (too intent to hear them) : O to think of it !
Talk, do, chatter some nonsense, else I'll think :
And then I'm feeling like a grub that crawls
All abroad in a dusty road ; and high
Above me, and shaking the ground beneath me, come
Wheels of a thundering wain, right where I'm plodding.

Sollers : Queer thinking, that.

Stranger : And here's a queerer thing.
I have a sort of lust in me, pushing me still
Into that terrible way of thinking, like
Black men in India lie them down and long
To feel their holy wagon crack their spines.

Merrick: Do you mean beetles? I've driven over scores, They sprawling on their backs, or standing mazed. I never knew they liked it.

Sollers : He means frogs.
I know what's in his mind. When I was young

My mother would catch us frogs and set them down,
Lapt in a screw of paper, in the ruts,
And carts going by would quash 'em ; and I'd laugh,
And yet be thinking, " Suppose it was myself
Twisted stiff in huge paper, and wheels
Big as the wall of a barn treading me flat! "

Huff : I know what's in his mind : just madness it is.
He's lookt too hard at his fellows in the world ;
Sight of their monstrous hearts, like devils in cages,
Has jolted all the gearing of his wits.
It needs a tough brain, ay, a brain like mine,
To pore on ugly sin and not go mad.

Stranger : Madness ! You're not far out.—I came up here
To be alone and quiet in my thoughts,
Alone in my own dreadful mind. The path,
Of red sand trodden hard, went up between
High hedges overgrown of hawthorn blowing
White as clouds ; ay it seemed burrowed through
A white sweet-smelling cloud,—I walking there
Small as a hare that runs its tunnelled drove
Thro' the close heather. And beside my feet
Blue greygles drifted gleaming over the grass ;
And up I climbed to sunlight green in birches,
And the path turned to daisies among grass
With bonfires of the broom beside, like flame
Of burning straw : and I lookt into your valley.
I could scarce look.
Anger was smarting in my eyes like grit.
O the fine earth and fine all for nothing !
Mazed I walkt, seeing and smelling and hearing :

The meadow lands all shining fearfully gold,—
Cruel as fire the sight of them toucht my mind ;
Breathing was all a honey taste of clover
And bean flowers : I would have rather had it
Carrion, or the stink of smouldering brimstone.
And larks aloft, the happy piping fools,
And squealing swifts that slid on hissing wings,
And yellowhammers playing spry in hedges :
I never noted them before ; but now—
Yes, I was mad, and crying mad, to see
The earth so fine, fine all for nothing !

Sollers : (spits) : Pst ! yellow hammers ! He talks gentry talk.
That's worse than being mad.

Stranger : I tell you, you'll be feeling them to-morn
And hating them to be so wonderful.

Merrick : Let's have some sense. Where do you live ?

Stranger : Nowhere .
I'm always travelling.

Huff : Why, what's your trade ?

Stranger : A dowser.

Huff : You're the man for me !

Stranger : Not I.

Huff : Ho, this is better than a fiddler now !
One of those fellows who have nerves so clever
That they can feel the waters of underground
Tingling in their fingers ?

You find me a spring in my high grazing-field,
I'll give you what I save in trundling water.

Stranger : I find your water now !—No, but I'll find you
Fire and fear and unbelievable death.

VINE the Publican comes in.

Vine : Are ye all served ? Ay, seems so ; what's your score ?

Merrick : Two ciders.

Huff : Three.

Sollers : And two for me.

Vine (to Dowser) : And you ?

Dowser : Naught. I was waiting on you.

Vine : Will you drink ?

Dowser : Ay ! Drink ! what else is left for a man to do
Who knows what I know ?

Vine : Good. What is't you know ?
You tell it out and set my trade a-buzzing.

Sollers : He's queer. Give him his mug and ease his tongue.

Vine : I had to swill the pigs : else I'd been here ;
But we've the old fashion in this house ; you draw,
I keep the score. Well, what's the worry on you ?

Sollers : O he's in love.

Dowser : You fleering grinning louts,
I'll give it you now ; now have it in your faces !

Sollers : Crimini, he's going to fight !

Dowser : You try and fight with the thing that's on my side !

Merrick : A ranter !

Huff : A boozy one then.

Dowser : Open yon door ;
'Tis dark enough by now. Open it, you.

Vine : Hold on. Have you got something fierce outside ?

Merrick : A Russian bear ?

Sollers : Dowsers can play strange games.

Huff : No tricks !

Dowser : This is a trick to rouse the world.

[He opens the door.]

Look out ! Between the elms ! There's my fierce thing.

Merrick : He means the star with the tail like a feather of fire.

Sollers : Comet, it's called.

Huff : Do you mean the comet, mister ?

Dowser : What do you think of it ?

Huff : Pretty enough.

But I saw a man loose off a rocket once ;

It made more stir and flare of itself ; though yon

Does better at steady burning.

Dowser : Stir and flare !

You'll soon forget your rocket.

Merrick : Tell you what

I thought last night, now, going home. Says I,

'Tis just the look of a tadpole : if I saw

A tadpole silver as a dace that swam

Upside-down towards me through black water,

I'd see the plain spit of that star and his tail.

Sollers : And how does your thought go ?

Dowser : It's what I know !—

A tadpole and a rocket !—My dear God,

And I can still laugh out !—What do you think

Your tadpole's made of ? What lets your rocket fling

Those streaming sparks across the half of night,

Splashing the burning spray of its haste among

The quiet business of the other stars ?

Ay, that's a fiery jet it leaves behind

In such enormous drift ! What sort of fire

Is spouted so, spouted and never quenching ?—

There is no name for that star's fire : it is

The fire that was before the world was made,

'The fire that all the things we live among
Remember being; and whitest fire we know
Is its poor copy in their dreaming trance!

Huff: That would be hell fire.

Dowser : Ay, if you like, hell fire,
Hell fire flying through the night ! 'Twould be
A thing to blink about, a blast of it
Swept in your face, eh ? and a thing to set
The whole stuff of the earth smoking rarely ?
Which of you said " the heat's a wonder to-night " ?
You have not done with marvelling. There'll come
A night when all your clothes are a pickle of sweat,
And, for all that, the sweat on your salty skin
Shall dry and crack, in the breathing of a wind
That's like a draught come through an open'd furnace.
The leafage of the trees shall brown and faint,
All sappy growth turning to brittle rubbish
As the near heat of the star strokes the green earth ;
And time shall brush the fields as visibly
As a rough hand brushes against the nap
Of gleaming cloth—killing the season's colour,
Each hour charged with the wasting of a year ;
And sailors panting on their warping decks
Will watch the sea steam like broth about them.
You'll know what I know then !—That towering star
Hangs like a fiery buzzard in the night
Intent over our earth—Ay, now his journey
Points, straight as a plummet's drop, down to us !

Huff: Why, that's the end of the world!

Dowser : You've said it now.

Sollers : What, soon ? In a day or two ?

Merrick : You can't mean that !

Vine : End of the World ! Well now, I never thought
To hear the news of that. If you've the truth
In what you say, likely this is an evening
That we'll be talking over often and often.

"How was it, Sollers ? " I'll say ; " or you, Merrick,
Do you mind clearly how he lookt ? "—And then—
" 'End of the world ! ' he said, and drank—like that,
Solemn ! "—And right he was : he had it all
As sure as I have when my sow's to farrow.

Dowser : Are you making a joke of me ? Keep your mind
For tippling while you can.

Vine : Was that a joke ?
I'm always bad at seeing 'em, even my own.

Dowser : A fool's ! 'Twill cheer you when the earth blows up
Like as it were all gunpowder.

Vine : You mean
The star will butt his burning head against us ?
'Twill knock the world to flinders, I suppose ?

Dowser : Ay, or with that wild monstrous tail of his
Smash down upon the air, and make it bounce
Like water under the flukes of a harpooned whale,
And thrash it to a poisonous fire ; and we
And all the life of the world drowned in blazing !

Vine : 'Twill be a handsome sight. If my old wife
Were with me now ! This would have suited her.
" I do like things to happen ! " she would say ;
Never shindy enough for her ; and now
She's gone, and can't be seeing this !

Dowser :

You poor fool.

How will it be a sight to you, when your eyes
Are scorcht to little cinders in your head ?

Vine: Whether or no, there must be folks outside
Willing to know of this. I'll scatter your news.

[*He goes.*]

[A short pause: then SOLLERS breaks out.

Sollers : No, no ; it wouldn't do for me at all ;
Nor for you neither, Merrick ? End of the World ?
Bogy ! A parson's tale or a bairn's !

Merrick :

That's it.

Your trade's a gift, easy as playing tunes.
But Sollers here and I, we've had to drill
Sinew and muscle into their hard lesson,
Until they work in timber and glowing iron
As kindly as I pick up my pint : your work
Grows in your nature, like plain speech in a child,
But we have learnt to think in a foreign tongue ;
And something must come out of all our skill !
We shan't go sliding down as glib as you
Into notions of the End of the World.

Sollers : Give me a tree, you may say, and give me steel,
And I'll put forth my shapely mind ; I'll make,
Out of my head like telling a well-known tale,
A wain that goes as comely on the roads
As a ship sailing, the lines of it true as gospel.
Have I learnt that all for nothing ?—O no !
End of the World ? It wouldn't do at all.
No more making of wains, after I've spent
My time in getting the right skill in my hands ?

Dowser : Ay, you begin to feel it now, I think ;
But you complain like boys for a game spoilt :
Shaping your carts, forging your iron ! But Life,
Life, the mother who lets her children play
So seriously busy, trade and craft,—
Life with her skill of a million year's perfection
To make her heart's delighted glorying
Of sunlight, and of clouds about the moon,
Spring lighting her daffodils, and corn
Ripening gold to ruddy, and giant seas,
And mountains sitting in their purple clothes—
O life I am thinking of, life the wonder,
All blotcht out by a brutal thrust of fire
Like a midge that a clumsy thumb squashes and smears.

Huff : Let me but see the show beginning, though !
You'd mind me then ! O I would like you all
To watch how I should figure, when the star
Brandishes over the whole air its flame
Of thundering fire ; and naught but yellow rubbish
Parcht on the perishing ground, and there are tongues
Chapt with thirst, glad to lap stinking ponds,
And pale glaring faces spying about
On the earth withering, terror the only speech !
Look for me then, and see me stand alone
Easy and pleasant in the midst of it all.
Did you not make your merry scoff of me ?
Was it your talk, that when yon shameless pair
Threw their wantoning in my face like dirt,
I had no heart against them but to grumble ?
You would be saying that, I know ! But now,

Now I believe it's time for you to see
My patient heart at last taking its wages.

Sollers : Pull up, man ! Screw the brake on your running tongue,
Else it will rattle you down the tumbling way
This fellow's gone.

Merrick : And one man's enough
With brain quagged axledeep in crazy mire.
We won't have you beside him in his puddles,
And calling out with him on the End of the World
To heave you out with a vengeance.

Huff : What you want !
Have I not borne enough to make me know
I must be righted sometime ?—And what else
Would break the hardy sin in them, which lets
Their souls parade so daring and so tall
Under God's hate and mine ? What else could pay
For all my wrong but a blow of blazing anger
Striking down to shiver the earth, and change
Their strutting wickedness to horror and crying ?

Merrick : Be quiet, Huff ! If you mean to believe
This dowser's stuff, and join him in his bedlam,
By God, you'll have to reckon with my fist.

*SHALE comes in. HUFF glares at him speechless, but with
wrath evidently working.*

Shale : Where's the joker ? You, is it ? Here's hot news
You've brought us ; all the valley's hissing aloud,
And makes as much of you falling into it
As a pail of water would of a glowing coal.

Sollers : Don't you start burbling too, Shale.

Shale : That's the word !

Bubbling, simmering, ay and bumpy-boiling :
All the women are mobbed together close
Under the witan-trees, and their full minds
Boil like so many pans slung on a fire.
Why, starlings trooping in a copse in fall
Could make no scandal like it.

Merrick : What is it, man ?

Shale : End of the World ! The flying star ! End of the World !

Sollers : They don't believe it though ?

Shale : What ? the whole place

Has gone just randy over it !

Merrick : Hold your noise !

Sollers : I shall be daft if this goes on.

Shale : Ay, so ?

The End of the World's been here ? You look as though

You'd startled lately. And there's the virtuous man !

How would End of the World suit our good Huff,

Our old crab-verjuice Huff ?

Huff (seizing the DOWSER and bringing him up in front of SHALE)

Look at him there !

This is the man I told you of, when you

Were talking small of sin. You made it out,

Did you, a fool's mere nasty game, like dogs

That snuggle in muck, and grin and roll themselves

With snoring pleasure ? Ah, but you are wrong.

'Tis something that goes thrusting dreadfully

Its wilful bravery of evil against

The worth and right of goodness in the world :

Ay, do you see how his face still brags at me ?

And long it has been, the time he's had to walk

Lascelles Abercrombie

Lordling about me with his wickedness.
 Do you know what he dared ? I had a wife,
 A flighty pretty linnet-headed girl,
 But mine : he practised on her with his eyes ;
 He knew of luring glances, and she went
 After his calling lust : and all since then
 They've lived together, fleering in my face,
 Pleased in sight of the windows of my house
 With doing wrong, and making my disgrace.
 O but wait here with me ; wait till your news
 Is not to be mistaken, for the way
 The earth buckles and sings like hot boards :
 You'll surely see how dreadful sin can be
 Then, when you mark these two running about,
 With raging fear for what they did against me
 Buzzing close to their souls, stinging their hearts,
 And they like scampering beasts when clegs are fierce,
 Or flinging themselves low as the ground to writhe,
 Their arms hugging their desperate heads. And then
 You'll see what 'tis to be an upright man,
 Who keeps a patient anger for his wrongs
 Thinking of judgment coming—you will see that
 When you mark how my looks hunt these wretches,
 And smile upon their groans and posturing anguish.
 O watch how calm I'll be, when the blazing air
 Judges their wickedness ; you watch me then
 Looking delighted, like a nobleman
 Who sees his horse winning an easy race.

Merrick : You fool, Huff, you believe it now !

Huff: You fool,

Merrick, how should I not believe a thing
That calls aloud on my mind and spirit, and they
Answer to it like starving conquering soldiers
Told to break out and loot ?

Shale : You vile old wasp !

Sollers : We've talkt enough : let's all go home and sleep ;
There might be a fiend in the air about us, one
Who pours his will into our minds to see
How we can frighten one another.

Huff: A fiend!

Shale will soon have the flapping wings of a fiend,
And flaming wings, beating about his head.
There'll be no air for Shale, very soon now,
But the breathing of a fiend : the star's coming !
The star that breathes a horrible fury of fire
Like glaring fog into the empty night ;
And in the gust of its wrath the world will soon
Shrivel and spin like paper in a furnace.
I knew they both would have to pay me at last
With sight of their damned souls for all my wrong !

Shale: Somebody stop his gab.

Merrick (seizing the DOWSER and shaking him) : Is it the truth ?
Is it the truth we're in the way of the star ?

Sollers : O let us go home ; let us go home and sleep !

A crowd of men and women burst in and shout confusedly

1. Look out for the star!
2. 'Tis moving, moving.
3. Grows as you stare at it.
4. Bigger than ever.

1. Down it comes with a diving pounce,
As though it had lookt for us and at last found us.

2. O so near and coming so quick !

3. And how the burning hairs of its tail
Do seem surely to quiver for speed.

4. We saw its great tail twitch behind it,
'Tis come so near, so gleaming near.

1. The tail is wagging !

2. Come out and see !

3. The star is wagging its tail and eyeing us—

4. Like a cat huncht to leap on a bird.

Merrick : Out of my way and let me see for myself.

[They all begin to hustle out :

HUFF speaks in midst of the turmoil.

Huff : Ay, now begins the just man's reward ;
And hatred of the evil thing
Now is to be satisfied.

Wrong ventured out against me and braved :
And I'll be glad to see all breathing pleasure
Burn as foolishly to naught
As a moth in candle flame,
If I but have my will to watch over those
Who injured me bawling hoarse heartless fear.

They are all gone but HUFF, SHALE and the DOWSER.

Shale : As for you, let you and the women make
Your howling scare of this ; I'll stand and laugh.
But if it truly were the End of the World,
I'd be the man to face it out, not you :
I who have let life go delighted through me,
Not you, who've sulkt away your chance of life

In mumping about being paid for goodness.

[*Going.*

Huff (after him) : You wait, you wait !

[*He follows the rest.*

Dowser (alone) : Naught but a plague of flies !

I cannot do with noises, and light fools
Terrified round me ; I must go out and think
Where there is quiet and no one near. O, think !
Life that has done such wonders with its thinking,
And never daunted in imagining ;
That has put on the sun and the shining night,
The flowering of the earth and tides of the sea,
And irresistible rage of fate itself,
All these as garments for its spirit's journey—
O now this life, in the brute chance of things,
Murder'd, uselessly murder'd ! And naught else
For ever but senseless rounds of hurrying motion
That cannot glory in itself. O no !
I will not think of that ; I'll blind my brain
With fancying the splendours of destruction ;
When like a burr in the star's fiery mane
The crackling earth is caught and rusht along,
The forests on the mountains blazing so,
That from the rocks of ore beneath them come
White-hot rivers of smelted metal pouring
Across the plains to roar into the sea. . . .

The Curtain is lowered for a few moments only.

ACT II.

As before, a little while after. The room is empty when the curtain goes up. SOLLERS runs in and paces about, but stops short when he catches sight of a pot dog on the mantelpiece.

Sollers : The pace it is coming down !—What to do now ?—
My brain has stopt : it's like a clock that's fallen
Out of a window and broke all its cogs.—
Where's that old cider, Vine would have us pay
Twopence a glass for ? Let's try how it smells :
Old Foxwhelp, and a humming stingo it is !

(To the pot dog.)

Hullo, you ! What are you grinning at ?—
I know ! There'll be no score against me for this drink !
O that score ! I've drunk it down for a week
With every gulp of cider, and every gulp
Was half the beauty it should have been, the score
So scratcht my swallowing throat, like a wasp in the drink !
And I need never have heeded it !—
Old grinning dog ! You've seen me happy here ;
And now, all's done ! But do you know this too,
That I can break you now, and never called
To pay for you ? *[Throwing the dog on the floor.*

I shall be savage soon !

We're leaving all this !—O, and it was so pleasant
Here, in here, of an evening.— Smash !

[He sweeps a lot of crockery on to the floor.

It's all no good ! Let's make a wreck of it all !

[Picking up a chair and swinging it.

Damn me ! Now I'm forgetting to drink, and soon

'Twill be too late. Where's there a mug not shivered ?

[*He goes to draw himself cider. MERRICK rushes in.*

Merrick : You at the barrels too ? Out of the road !

[*He pushes SOLLERS away and spills his mug.*

Sollers : Go and kick out of doors, you black donkey.

Merrick : Let me come at the vessel, will you ?

[*They wrestle savagely.*

Sollers :

Keep off ;

I'm the first here. Lap what you've spilt of mine.

Merrick : You with your chiselling and screw-driving,
Your wooden work, you bidding me, the man
Who hammers a meaning into red hot iron ?

[*VINE comes in slowly. He is weeping ; the two wrestlers stop and stare at him, as he sits down, and holds his head in his hands, sobbing.*

Vine : O this is a cruel affair !

Sollers : Here's Vine crying !

Vine : I've seen the moon.

Merrick : The moon ? 'Tisn't the moon

That's tumbling on us, but yon raging star.

What notion now is clotted in your head ?

Vine : I've seen the moon ; it has nigh broke my heart.

Sollers : Not the moon too jumping out of her ways ?

Vine : No, no ;—but going quietly and shining,

Pushing away a flimsy gentle cloud

That would drift smoky round her, fending it off

With steady rounds of blue and yellow light.

It was not much to see. She was no more

Than a curved bit of silver rind. But I

Never before so noted her—

Why was I like a man sworn to a thing
Working to have my wains in every curve,
Ay, every tenon, right and as they should be ?
Not for myself, not even for those wains :
But to keep in me living at its best
The skill that must go forward and shape the world,
Helping it on to make some masterpiece.

Merrick : And never was there aught to come of it !
The world was always looking to use its life
In some great handsome way at last. And now—
We are just fooled. There never was any good
In the world going on or being at all.
The fine things life has plotted to do are worth
A rotten toadstool kickt to flying bits.
End of the World ? Ay, and the end of a joke.

Vine : Well, Huff's the man for this turn.

Merrick : Ay, the good man !
He could but grunt when times were pleasant ; now
There's misery enough to make him trumpet.
And yet, by God, he shan't come blowing his horn
Over my misery !
We are just fooled, did I say ?— We fooled ourselves,
Looking for worth in what was still to come ;
And now there's a stop to our innings. Well, that's fair :
I've been a living man, and might have been
Nothing at all ! I've had the world about me,
And felt it as my own concern. What else
Should I be crying for ? I've had my turn.
The world may be for the sake of naught at last,
But it has been for my sake : I've had that.

[*He sits again, and broods.*]

Sollers : I can't stay here. I must be where my sight
May silence with its business all my thinking,—
Though it will be the star plunged down so close
It puffs its flaming vengeance in my face.

[*He goes.*]

Vine : I wish there were someone who had done me wrong,
Like Huff with his wife and Shale ; I wish there were
Somebody I would like to see go crazed
With staring fright. I'd have my pleasure then
Of living on into the End of the World.
But there is no one at all for me, no one
Now my poor wife is gone.

Merrick : Why, what did she
To harm you ?

Vine : Didn't she marry me ?—It's true
She made it come all right. She died at last.
Besides, it would be wasting wishes on her,
To be in hopes of her weeping at this.
She'd have her hands on her hips and her tongue jumping
As nimble as a stoat, delighting round
The way the world's to be terrible and tormented.—
Ay, but I'll have a thing to tell her now
When she begins to ask the news ! I'll say
" You've misst such a show as never was nor will be,
A roaring great affair of death and ruin ;
And I was there—the world smasht to sparkles ! "
O, I can see her vext at that !

[*MERRICK has been sunk in thought during this, but VINE seems to brighten at his notion, and speaks quite cheerfully to HUFF who now comes in, looking mopish, and sits down.*]

Vine : We've all been envying you, Huff. You're well off,
You with your goodness and your enemies
Showing you how to relish it with their terror.
When do you mean the gibing is to start ?

Huff : There's time enough.

Vine : O, do they still hold out ?
If they should be for spiting you to the last !
You'd best keep on at them : think out a list
Of frantic things for them to do, when air
Is scorching smother and the sin they did
Frightens their hearts. You'll shout them into fear,
I undertake, if you find breath enough.

Huff : You have the breath. What's all your pester for ?
You leave me be.

Vine : Why, you're to do for me
What I can't do myself.—And yet it's hard
To make out where Shale hurt you. What's the sum
Of all he did to you ? Got you quit of marriage
Without the upset of a funeral.

Huff : Why need you blurt your rambling mind at me ?
Let me bide quiet in my thought awhile,
And it's a little while we have for thought.

Merrick : I know your thought ! Paddling round and around,
Like a squirrel working in a spinning cage
With his neck stretcht to have his chin poke up,
And silly feet busy and always going ;
Paddling round the story of your good life,
Your small good life, and how the decent men
Have jeered at your wry antic.

Huff : My good life !

And what good has my goodness been to me ?
You show me that ! Somebody show me that !
A caterpillar munching a cabbage-heart,
Always drudging further and further from
The sounds and lights of the world, never abroad
Nor flying free in warmth and air sweet-smelling :
A crawling caterpillar, eating his life
In a deaf dark—that's my gain of goodness !
And it's too late to hatch out now !—
I can but fancy what I might have been ;
I scarce know how to sin !— But I believe
A long while back I did come near to it.

Merrick : Well done !— O but I should have guesst all this !

Huff : I was in Droitwich ; and the sight of the place
Is where they cook the brine : a long dark shed,
Hot as an oven, full of a grey steam
And ruddy light that leaks out of the furnace ;
And stirring the troughs, ladling the brine that boils
As thick as treacle, a double standing row,
Women—boldly talking in wicked jokes
All day long. I went to see 'em. It was
A wonderful rousing sight. Not one of them
Was really wearing clothes : half of a sack
Pinned in an apron was enough for most,
And here and there might be a petticoat ;
But nothing in the way of bodices.—
O, they knew words to shame a carter's face !

Merrick : This is the thought you would be quiet in !

Huff : Where else can I be quiet ? Now there's an end
Of daring, 'tis the one place my life has made

Where I may try to dare in thought. I mind,
When I stood in the midst of those bare women,
All at once, outburst with a rising buzz,
A mob of flying thoughts was wild in me :
Things I might do swarmed in my brain pell-mell,
Like a heap of flies kickt into humming cloud.
I beat them down ; and now I cannot tell
For certain what they were. I can call up
Naught venturesome and darting like their style ;
Very tame braveries now !—O Shale's the man
To smile upon the End of the World ; 'tis Shale
Has lived the bold stiff fashion, and filled himself
With thinking pride in what a man may do.—
I wish I had seen those women more than once !

Vine : Well, here's an upside down ! This is old Huff !
What have you been in your heart all these years ?
The man you were or the new man you are ?

Huff : Just a dead flesh !

Merrick : Nay, Huff the good man at least
Was something alive, though snarling like trapt vermin.
But this ? What's this for the figure of a man ?
'Tis a boy's smutty picture on a wall.

Huff : I was alive, was I ? Like a blind bird
That flies and cannot see the flight it takes,
Feeling it with mere rowing of its wings.
But Shale—he's had a stirring sense of what he is.

*Shouting outside. Then SOLLERS walks in again, very
quiet and steady. He stands in the middle, looking down
on the floor.*

Vine : What do they holla for there ?

Sollers : The earth.

Merrick : The earth ?

Sollers: The earth's afire.

Huff: The earth blazing already? [*Shouts again.*]

O. not so soon as this?

Vine: What sort of a fire?

Sollers : The earth has caught the heat of the star, you fool.

Merrick: I know: there's come some dazzle in your eyes
From facing to the star; a lamp would do it.

Huff: It will be that. Your sight, being so strained,
Is flashing of itself.

Sollers : Say what you like.
There's a red flare out of the land beyond
Looking over the hills into our valley.
The thing's begun, 'tis certain. Go and see.

Vine: I won't see that. I will stay here.

Sollers : Ay, creep
Into your oven. You'll be cooler there.—
O my God, we'll all be coals in an hour ! [*Shouts again.*]

Huff: And I have naught to stand in my heart upright,
And vow it made my living time worth more
Than if my time had been death in a grave!

Several persons run in.

The Crowd. 1. The river's the place!

2. The only safe place now!

3. Best all charge down to the river !

4. For there's a blaze,

A travelling blaze comes racing along the earth.

Sollers : 'Tis true. The air's red-hot above the hills.

The Crowd: 1. Ay, but the burning now crests the hill-tops
In quiver of yellow flame.

2. And a great smoke

Waving and tumbling upward.

3. The river now !

4. The only place we have, not to be roasted!

Merrick : And what will make us water-rats or otters,
To keep our breath still living through a dive
That lasts until the earth's burnt out ? Or how
Would that trick serve, when we stand up to gasp,
And find the star waiting for our plunged heads
To knock them into pummy ?

Vine: Scarce more dazed
I'd be with that than now. I shall be bound,
When I'm to give my wife the tale of it all,
To be devising : more of this to-do
My mind won't carry.

Huff: O ashamed I am,
Ashamed!— It needn't have been downright feats,
Such as the braving men, the like of Shale,
Do easily, and smile, keeping them up.
If I could look back to one manful hour
Of romping in the face of all my goodness!—

SHALE comes in, dragging Mrs. HUFF by the hand.

Shale: Huff! Where's Huff?—Huff, you must take her back! You'll take her back? She's yours: I give her up.

Merrick : Belike here's something bold again.

Mrs. Huff (to SHALE) : Once more,
Listen.

Shale : I will not listen. There's no time
For aught but giving you back where you belong ;—
And that's with you, Huff. Take her.

Huff: Here is depth
I cannot see to. Is it your last fling?—
The dolt I am in these things!— What's this way
You've found of living wickedly to the end?

Shale : Scorn as you please, but take her back, man, take her.

Huff: But she's my wife! Take her back now? What for?

Mrs. Huff : What for ? Have you not known of thieves that throw
Their robbery down, soon as they hear a step
Sounding behind them on the road, and run
A long way off, and pull an honest face ?
Ay, see Shale's eyes practising baby-looks !
He never stole, not he !

Shale : Don't hear her talk.

Mrs. Huff: But he was a talker once! Love was the thing;
And love, he swore, would make the wrong go right,
And Huff was a kind of devil—and that's true——

Huff: What? I've been devilish and never knew?

Mrs. Huff: The devil in the world that hates all love.
But Shale said, he'd the love in him would hold
If the world's frame and the fate of men were crackt.

Shale : What I said !

Whoever thought the world was going to crack?

Mrs. Huff: And now he hears someone move behind him.—They'll say, perhaps, "You stole this!"—Down it goes, Thrown to the dirty road—thrown to Huff!

Shale: Yes, to the owner.

Mrs. Huff : It was not such brave thieving. You did not take me from my owner, Shale : There's an old robber will do that some day, Not you.

Vine : Were you thinking of me then, missis ?

Mrs. Huff (still to SHALE) : You found me lost in the dirt : I was with Huff.

You lifted me from there ; and there again,
Like a frightened urchin, you're for throwing me.

Shale : Let it be that ! I'm firm
Not to have you about me, when the thing,
Whatever it is, that's standing now behind
The burning of the world, comes out on us.

Huff : The way men cheat ! This windle-stalk was he
Would hold a show of spirit for the world
To study while it ruined !—Make what you please
Of your short wrangle here, but leave me out.
I have my thoughts—O far enough from this. [*Turning away.*]

Shale (seizing him) : You shall not put me off. I tell you, Huff,
You are to take her back now.

Huff : Take her back !
And what has she to do with what I want ?

Shale : Isn't she yours ? I must be quit of her ;
I'll not be in the risk of keeping her.
She's yours !

Huff : And what's the good of her now to me ?
What's the good of a woman whom I've married ?

During this, WARP the molecatcher has come in.

Warp : Shale and Huff at their old pother again !

Merrick : The molecatcher !

Sollers : Warp, have you travelled far ?
Is it through frenzy and ghastly crowds you've come ?

Vine : Have you got dreadful things to tell us, Warp ?

Warp : Why, no.

Be not old Huff's.

Sollers : That flare a fired stack ?

Huff : Only one of my ricks alight ? O Glory !

There may be chance for me yet.

Merrick : Best take the train

To Droitwich, Huff.

Vine (at the door) : It would be like a stack,

But for the star.

Sollers (to WARP) : Yes, as you're so clever,

You can talk down maybe yon brandishing star !

Warp : O, 'tis the star has flickt your brains ? Indeed,

The tail swings long enough to-night for that.

Well, look your best at it ; 'tis off again

To go its rounds, they tell me, from now on ;

And the next time it swaggers in our sky,

The moles a long while will have tired themselves

Of having their easy joke with me. [*A pause.*]

Merrick : You mean

The flight of the star is from us ?

Sollers : But the world,

The whole world reckons on it battering us !

Warp : Who told you that ?

Sollers : A dowser.

Merrick : Where's he gone ?

Warp : A dowser ! say a tramping conjurer.

You'll believe aught, if you believe a dowser.

Sollers : I had it in me to be doubting him.

Merrick ; The noise you made was like that ! But I knew

You'd laugh at me, so sure you were the world

Would shiver like a bursting grindlestone :

Else I'd have said out loud, 'twas a fool's whimsy.

Vine : Where are you now ? What am I now to think ?
Your minds run round in puzzles, like chased hares.
I cannot sight them.

Merrick : Think of going to bed.

Sollers : And dreaming prices for your pigs.

Merrick : O Warp,
You should have seen Vine crying ! The moon, he said,
The silver moon ! Just like an onion 'twas
To stir the water in his eyes.

Sollers : He's left
A puddle of his tears where he was droopt
Over the table

Vine : There's to be no ruin ?—
But what's the word of a molecatcher, to crow
So ringing over a dowser's word ?

Warp : I'll tell you.
These dowsers live on lies : my trade's the truth.
I can read moles, and the way they've dug their journeys,
Where you'd not see a wrinkle.

Vine : And he knows
The buried water.

Warp : There's always buried water,
If you prod deep enough. A dowser finds
Because the whole earth's floating, like a raft.
What does he know ? A twitching in his thews.
A dog asleep knows that much. What I know
I've learnt, and if I'd learnt it wrong, I'd starve.
And if I'm right about the grubbing moles,
Won't I be right for news of walking men ?

Merrick : Of course you're right. Let's put the whole thing by,
And have a pleasant drink.

Shale (to *Mrs. HUFF*) : You must be tired
With all this story. Shall we be off for home ?

Huff : You brass ! You don't go now with her ! She's mine :
You gave her up.

Shale : And you made nothing of her.

(to *Mrs. HUFF*) : Come on.

Mrs. Huff : Warp, will you do a thing for me ?

Warp : A hundred things.

Mrs. Huff : Then slap me these cur-dogs.

Warp : I will. Where will I slap them, and which first ?

Mrs. Huff : Maybe 'twill do if you but laugh at them.

Warp : I'll try for that ; but they are not good jokes ;
Though there's a kind of monkey-look about them.

Mrs. Huff : They thinking I'd be near one or the other
After this night ! Will I be made no more
Than clay that children puddle to their minds,
Moulding it what they fancy ?—*Shale* was brave :
He made a boggy and defied it, till
He frightened of his work and ran away.
But *Huff* !— *Huff* was for modelling wickedly :

Huff : Who told you that ?

Mrs. Huff : I need no one's telling.

I was your wife once. Don't I know your goodness ?
A stupid heart gone sour with jealousy,
To feel its blood too dull and thick for sinning.—
Yes, *Huff* would figure a wicked thought, but had
No notion how, and flung the clay aside.—
O they were gaudy colours both ! But now

Fear has bleacht their swagger and left them blank,
Fear of a loon that cried, End of the World !

Huff : Shale, do you know what we're to do ?

Shale : I'd like

To have the handling of that dowser-man.

Huff : Just that, my lad, just that !

Warp : And your fired rick ?

Huff : Let it be blazes ! Quick, Shale, after him !

I'll tramp the night out, but I'll take the rogue.

Shale (to the others) : You wait, and see us haul him by the ears,
And swim the blatherer in Huff's farm-yard pond.

As HUFF and SHALE go out, they see the comet before them.

Huff : The devil's own star is that !

Shale : And floats as calm

As a pike basking.

Huff : There shouldn't be such stars !

Shale : Neither such dowsers, and we'll learn him that.

[They go off together.]

Sollers : Why, the star's dwindling now, surely !

Merrick : O, small

And dull now to the glowing size it was.

Vine : But is it certain there'll be nothing smasht ?

Not even a house knockt roaring down in crumbles ?

— And I did think, I'd open my wife's mouth

With envy of the dreadful things I'd seen !

CURTAIN.

I.

I know not how these men or those may take
Their first glad measure of love's character,
Or whether one should let the summer make
Love's festival, and one the falling year.

I only know that in my prime of days
When my young branches came to blossoming,
You were the sign that loosed my lips in praise,
You were the zeal that governed all my spring.

II.

In prudent counsel many gathered near,
Forewarning us of deft and secret snares
That are love's use. We heard them as we hear
The ticking of a clock upon the stairs.

The troops of reason, careful to persuade,
Blackened love's name, but love was more than these,
For we had wills to venture unafraid
The trouble of unnavigable seas.

III.

Their word was but a barren seed that lies
Undrawn of the sun's health and undesired,
Because the habit of their hearts was wise,
Because the wisdom of their tongues was tired.

For in the smother of contentious pride,
And in the fear of each tumultuous mood,
Our love has kept serenely fortified
And unsurped one stedfast solitude.

IV.

Dark words, and hasty humours of the blood
Have come to us and made no longer stay
Than footprints of a bird upon the mud
That in an hour the tide will take away.

But not March weather over ploughlands blown,
Nor cresses green upon their gravel bed,
Are beautiful with the clean rigour grown
Of quiet thought our love has piloted.

V.

I sit before the hearths of many men,
When speech goes gladly, eager to withhold
No word at all, yet when I pass again
The last of words is captive and untold.
We talk together in love's house, and there
No thought but seeks what counsel you may give,
And every secret trouble from its lair
Comes to your hand, no longer fugitive.

VI.

I woo the world, with burning will to be
Delighted in all fortune it may find,
And still the strident dogs of jealousy
Go mocking down the tunnels of my mind.
Only for you my contemplation goes
Clean as a god's, undarkened of pretence,
Most happy when your garner overflows,
Achieving in your prosperous diligence.

VII.

When from the dusty corners of my brain
Comes limping some ungainly word or deed,
I know not if my dearest friend's disdain
Be durable or brief, spent husk or seed.

But your rebuke and that poor fault of mine
Go straitly outcast, and we close the door,
And I, no promise asking and no sign,
Stand blameless in love's presence as before.

VIII.

A beggar in the ditch, I stand and call
My questions out upon the queer parade
Of folk that hurry by, and one and all
Go down the road with never answer made.

I do not question love. I am a lord
High at love's table, and the vigilant king,
Unquestioned, from the hubbub at the board
Leans down to me and tells me everything.

Fish (fly-replete, in depth of June,
Dawdling away their wat'ry noon)
Ponder deep wisdom, dark or clear,
Each secret fishy hope or fear.
Fish say, they have their Stream and Pond,
But is there anything Beyond?
This life cannot be All, they swear,
For how unpleasant, if it were!
One may not doubt that, somehow, Good
Shall come of Water and of Mud;
And, sure, the reverent eye must see
A Purpose in Liquidity.
We darkly know, by Faith we cry,
The future is not Wholly Dry.
Mud unto mud!—Death eddies near—
Not here the appointed End, not here!
But somewhere, beyond Space and Time,
Is wetter water, slimier slime!
And there (they trust) there swimmeth One
Who swam ere rivers were begun,
Immense, of fishy form and mind,
Squamous, omnipotent, and kind;
And under that Almighty Fin,
The littlest fish may enter in.
Oh! never fly conceals a hook,
Fish say, in the Eternal Brook,
But more than mundane weeds are there,
And mud, celestially fair;
Fat caterpillars drift around,
And Paradisal grubs are found;
Unfading moths, immortal flies,
And the worm that never dies.
And in that Heaven of all their wish,
There shall be no more land, say fish.

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old Man :

“ Alack, and well-a-day ! ”

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young Man :

“ The cherry-tree’s in flourish ! ”

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old Man :

“ The world is growing grey.”

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young Man :

“ The cherry-tree’s in flourish ! ”

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old Man :

“ Both flower and fruit decay.”

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young Man :

“ The cherry-tree’s in flourish ! ”

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old Man :

“ Alack, and well-a-day !

The world is growing grey ;

And flower and fruit decay.

Beware Old Man, beware Old Man !

For the end of life is nearing ;

And the grave yawns by the way. . . .”

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young Man :

“ I’m a trifle hard of hearing ;

And can’t catch a word you say. . . .

But the cherry-tree’s in flourish ! ”

Humming and creaking, the car down the street
Lumbered and lurched through thunderous gloam ;
Bearing us, spent and dumb with the heat,
From office and counter and factory home :

Sallow-faced clerks, genteel in black ;
Girls from the laundries, draggled and dank ;
Ruddy-faced labourers, slouching slack ;
A broken actor, grizzled and lank ;

A mother with querulous babe on her lap ;
A schoolboy whistling under his breath ;
An old man crouched in a dreamless nap ;
A widow with eyes on the eyes of death ;

A priest ; a sailor with deepsea gaze ;
A soldier in scarlet, with waxed moustache ;
A drunken trollop in velvet and lace ;
All silent in that tense dusk . . . when a flash

Of lightning shivered the sultry gloom :
With shattering brattle the whole sky fell
About us ; and rapt to a dazzling doom
We glided on in a timeless spell,

Unscathed through deluge and flying fire,
In a magical chariot of streaming glass,
Cut off from our kind and the world's desire,
Made one by the awe that had come to pass.

“ What fettle, mate ? ” to me he said
As he went by
With lifted head
And laughing eye,
Where, black against the dawning red,
The pit-heaps cut the sky :
“ What fettle, mate ? ”

“ What fettle, mate ? ” to him I said,
As he went by
With shrouded head
And darkened eye,
Borne homeward by his marrows, dead
Beneath the noonday sky :
“ What fettle, mate ? ”

Against the green flame of the hawthorn-tree
His scarlet tunic burns ;
And livelier than the green sap's mantling glee
The Spring fire tingles through him headily
As quivering he turns

And stammers out the old amazing tale
Of youth and April weather :
While she, with half-breathed jests that, sobbing, fail,
Sits, tight-lipped, quaking, eager-eyed and pale,
Beneath her purple feather.

Her day out from the workhouse-ward, she stands,
A grey-haired woman, decent and precise,
With prim black bonnet and neat paisley shawl,
Among the other children by the stall,
And with grave relish eats a penny ice.

To wizened toothless gums, with quaking hands
She holds it, shuddering with delicious cold:
Nor heeds the jeering laughter of young men,
The happiest, in her innocence, of all:
For, while their insolent youth must soon grow old,
She, who's been old, is now a child again.

In dream, again within the clean, cold hell
Of glazed and aching silence he was trapped ;
And, closing in, the blank walls of his cell
Crushed stifling on him . . . when the bracken snapped,
Caught in his clutching fingers : and he lay
Awake upon his back among the fern,
With free eyes travelling the wide blue day
Unhindered, unremembering ; while a burn
Tinkled and gurgled somewhere out of sight,
Unheard of him, till, suddenly aware
Of its cold music, shivering in the light,
He raised himself ; and with far-ranging stare
Looked all about him : and, with dazed eyes wide
Saw, still as in a numb, unreal dream,
Black figures scouring a far hill-side,
With now and then a sunlit rifle's gleam ;
And knew the hunt was hot upon his track :
Yet hardly seemed to mind, somehow, just then . . .
But kept on wondering why they looked so black
On that hot hillside, all those little men
Who scurried round like beetles—twelve, all told . . .
He counted them twice over ; and began
A third time reckoning them, but could not hold
His starved wits to the business, while they ran
So brokenly, and always stuck at " five " . . .
And " One, two, three, four, five " a dozen times
He muttered . . . " Can you catch a fish alive ? "
Sang mocking echoes of old nursery-rhymes
Through the strained, tingling hollow of his head.

And now, almost remembering, he was stirred
To pity them : and wondered if they'd fed
Since he had, or if, ever since they'd heard
Two nights ago the sudden signal-gun
That raised alarm of his escape, they, too,
Had fasted in the wilderness, and run
With nothing but the thirsty wind to chew,
And nothing in their bellies but a fill
Of cold peat water, till their heads were light . . .

The crackling of a rifle on the hill
Rang in his ears : and stung to headlong flight,
He started to his feet ; and through the brake
He plunged in panic, heedless of the sun
That burned his cropped head to a red-hot ache
Still racked with crackling echoes of the gun.
Then suddenly the sun-enkindled fire
Of gorse upon the moor-top caught his eye ;
And that gold glow held all his heart's desire,
As, like a witless flame-bewildered fly,
He blundered towards the league-wide yellow blaze,
And tumbled headlong on the spikes of bloom ;
And rising, bruised and bleeding and adaze,
Struggled through clutching spines : the dense, sweet fume
Of nutty, acrid scent like poison stealing
Through his hot blood : the bristling yellow glare
Spiking his eyes with fire, till he went reeling,
Stifling and blinded, on—and did not care

Though he were taken—wandering round and round,
“ Jerusalem the Golden ” quavering shrill,
Changing his tune to “ Tommy Tiddler’s Ground ” :
Till, just a lost child on that dazzling hill,
Bewildered in a glittering golden maze
Of stinging scented fire, he dropped, quite done,
A shrivelling wisp within a world ablaze
Beneath a blinding sky, one blaze of sun.

Mamua, when our laughter ends,
And hearts and bodies, brown as white,
Are dust about the doors of friends,
Or scent ablowing down the night,
Then, oh ! then, the wise agree,
Comes our immortality.
Mamua, there waits a land
Hard for us to understand.
Out of time, beyond the sun,
All are one in Paradise,
You and Pupure are one,
And Taiü, and the ungainly wise.
There the Eternals are, and there
The Good, the Lovely, and the True,
And Types, whose earthly copies were
The foolish broken things we knew ;
There is the Face, whose ghosts we are ;
The real, the never-setting Star ;
And the Flower, of which we love
Faint and fading shadows here ;
Never a tear, but only Grief ;
Dance, but not the limbs that move.
Songs in Song shall disappear ;
Instead of lovers, Love shall be ;
For hearts, Immutability ;
And there, on the Ideal Reef,
Thunders the Everlasting Sea !

And my laughter, and my pain,
Shall home to the Eternal Brain.
And all lovely things, they say,

Meet in Loveliness again ;
Miri's laugh, Teïpo's feet,
And the hands of Matua,
Stars and sunlight there shall meet,
Coral's hues and rainbows there,
And Teūra's braided hair ;
And with the starred *tiare's* white,
And white birds in the dark ravine,
And *flamboyants* ablaze at night,
And jewels, and evening's after-green,
And dawns of pearl and gold and red,
Mamua, your lovelier head !
And there'll no more be one who dreams
Under the ferns, of crumbling stuff,
Eyes of illusion, mouth that seems,
All time-entangled human love.
And you'll no longer swing and sway
Divinely down the scented shade,
Where feet to Ambulation fade,
And moons are lost in endless Day.
How shall we wind these wreaths of ours,
Where there are neither heads nor flowers ?
Oh, Heaven's Heaven !—but we'll be missing
The palms, and sunlight, and the south ;
And there's an end, I think, of kissing,
When our mouths are one with Mouth

Taû here, Mamua,
Crown the hair, and come away !
Hear the calling of the moon,
And the whispering scents that stray

About the idle warm lagoon.
Hasten, hand in human hand,
Down the dark, the flowered way,
Along the whiteness of the sand,
And in the water's soft caress,
Wash the mind of foolishness,
Mamua, until the day.
Spend the glittering moonlight there
Pursuing down the soundless deep
Limbs that gleam and shadowy hair,
Or floating lazy, half-asleep.
Dive and double and follow after,
Snare in flowers, and kiss, and call,
With lips that fade, and human laughter,
And faces individual,
Well this side of Paradise!
There's little comfort in the wise.

PAPEETE,

February, 1914.

In your arms was still delight,
Quiet as a street at night ;
And thoughts of you, I do remember,
Were green leaves in a darkened chamber,
Were dark clouds in a moonless sky.
Love, in you, went passing by,
Penetrative, remote, and rare,
Like a bird in the wide air,
And, as the bird, it left no trace
In the heaven of your face.
In your stupidity I found
The sweet hush after a sweet sound.
All about you was the light
That dims the greying end of night ;
Desire was the unrisen sun,
Joy the day not yet begun,
With tree whispering to tree,
Without wind, quietly.
Wisdom slept within your hair,
And Long-Suffering was there,
And, in the flowing of your dress,
Undiscerning Tenderness.
And when you thought, it seemed to me,
Infinitely, and like a sea,
About the slight world you had known
Your vast unconsciousness was thrown.

O haven without wave or tide !
Silence, in which all songs have died !
Holy book, where hearts are still !
And home at length under the hill !

O mother quiet, breasts of peace,
Where love itself would faint and cease !
O infinite deep I never knew,
I would come back, come back to you,
Find you, as a pool unstirred,
Kneel down by you, and never a word,
Lay my head, and nothing said,
In your hands, ungarlanded ;
And a long watch you would keep ;
And I should sleep, and I should sleep !

MATAIEA,

January, 1914.

I have been so great a lover : filled my days
So proudly with the splendour of Love's praise,
The pain, the calm, and the astonishment,
Desire illimitable, and still content,
And all dear names men use, to cheat despair,
For the perplexed and viewless streams that bear
Our hearts at random down the dark of life.
Now, ere the unthinking silence on that strife
Steals down, I would cheat drowsy Death so far,
My night shall be remembered for a star
That outshone all the suns of all men's days.
Shall I not crown them with immortal praise
Whom I have loved, who have given me, dared with me
High secrets, and in darkness knelt to see
The inenarrable godhead of delight ?
Love is a flame ;—we have beaconed the world's night.
A city :—and we have built it, these and I.
An emperor :—we have taught the world to die.
So, for their sakes I loved, ere I go hence,
And the high cause of love's magnificence,
And to keep loyalties young, I'll write those names
Golden for ever, eagles, crying flames,
And set them as a banner, that men may know,
To dare the generations, burn, and blow
Out on the wind of Time, shining and streaming

These I have loved :

White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines ; and feathery, faery dust ;
Wet roofs, beneath the lamp-light ; the strong crust
Of friendly bread ; and many-tasting food ;

Rainbows ; and the blue bitter smoke of wood ;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool flowers ;
And flowers themselves, that sway through sunny hours,
Dreaming of moths that drink them under the moon ;
Then, the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon
Smooth away trouble ; and the rough male kiss
Of blankets ; grainy wood ; live hair that is
Shining and free ; blue-massing clouds ; the keen
Unpassioned beauty of a great machine ;
The benison of hot water ; furs to touch ;
The good smell of old clothes ; and other such,
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers,
Hair's fragrance, and the musty reek that lingers
About dead leaves and last year's ferns . . .

Dear names,

And thousand other throng to me ! Royal flames ;
Sweet water's dimpling laugh from tap or spring ;
Holes in the ground ; and voices that do sing ;
Voices in laughter, too ; and body's pain,
Soon turned to peace ; and the deep-panting train ;
Firm sands ; the little dulling edge of foam
That browns and dwindles as the wave goes home ;
And washen stones, gay for an hour ; the cold
Graveness of iron ; moist black earthen mould ;
Sleep ; and high places ; footprints in the dew ;
And oaks ; and brown horse-chestnuts, glossy-new ;
And new-peeled sticks ; and shining pools on grass ;—
All these have been my loves. And these shall pass,
Whatever passes not, in the great hour,
Nor all my passion, all my prayers, have power
To hold them with me through the gate of Death.

They'll play deserter, turn with the traitor breath,
Break the high bond we made, and sell Love's trust
And sacramented covenant to the dust.
—Oh, never a doubt but, somewhere, I shall wake,
And give what's left of love again, and make
New friends, now strangers

But the best I've known,
Stays here, and changes, breaks, grows old, is blown
About the winds of the world, and fades from brains
Of living men, and dies.

Nothing remains.

O dear my loves, O faithless, once again
This one last gift I give : that after men
Shall know, and later lovers, far-removed,
Praise you, " All these were lovely " ; say, " He loved."

MATAIEA,

1914.

Warm perfumes like a breath from vine and tree
 Drift down the darkness. Plangent, hidden from eyes,
 Somewhere an *eukaleli* thrills and cries
 And stabs with pain the night's brown savagery.
 And dark scents whisper ; and dim waves creep to me,
 Gleam like a woman's hair, stretch out, and rise ;
 And new stars burn into the ancient skies,
 Over the murmurous soft Hawaiian sea.

And I recall, lose, grasp, forget again,
 And still remember, a tale I have heard, or known,
 An empty tale, of idleness and pain,
 Of two that loved—or did not love—and one
 Whose perplexed heart did evil, foolishly,
 A long while since, and by some other sea.

WAIKIKI,
1913.

In the grey tumult of these after years
 Oft silence falls ; the incessant wranglers part ;
And less-than-echoes of remembered tears
 Hush all the loud confusion of the heart ;
And a shade, through the toss'd ranks of mirth and crying,
 Hungers, and pains, and each dull passionate mood,—
Quite lost, and all but all forgot, undying,
 Comes back the ecstasy of your quietude.

So a poor ghost, beside his misty streams,
Is haunted by strange doubts, evasive dreams,
 Hints of a pre-Lethean life, of men,
Stars, rocks, and flesh, things unintelligible,
 And light on waving grass, he knows not when,
And feet that ran, but where, he cannot tell.

THE PACIFIC,

1914.

(To B.V.J.)

The Characters are—

ALICE.

JOAN, *her young Sister.*

SARAH.

AN OLD MAN.

A YOUNG STRANGER.

A mountain cottage. It is a midwinter night. Outside a snowstorm rages.

ALICE is looking through the window. JOAN, her young sister, and SARAH, an old neighbour woman, are sitting over the fire.

Alice : It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,
Nor lanterns in a blackness like to that.
How can they find him out ? It isn't fair.

Sarah : God is for prayers. You'll anger Him speaking so.

Alice : I have prayed these hours, and now I'm tired of it.
He is caught in some grip of the rocks, and crying out,
And crying and crying, and none can hear him cry,
Because of this great beastliness of noise.

Sarah : Past crying now, I think.

Joan: There, take no heed
Of what she says—it's a rusty mind she has,
Being old, and wizened with bad luck on the hills.

Sarah : Rusty or no, I've a thought the man is dead.
No news has been growing apace from nightfall on
Into bad news, and now it's as though one stood
At the door and said,—we found him lying cold.

Alice : Whist ! you old bitter woman. Will it never stay

THE STORM

John Drinkwater

In its wicked fury, . . . and the snow's like a black rain
Whipping the crying wind. If it would rest awhile
I could think and mind me what were best to do
To help my man. But a savagery like this
Beats at the wits till they have no tidiness.

Sarah : We'll sit and wait till they come.

Alice : And I a woman
Would never let him ask for anything,
Because of the daily thought I took for him,—
And against this spite now I've no strength at all.

Sarah : For all you would bake his bread to a proper turn
And remember always the day for his clean shift,
There was many a scolding word for him to bear.

Joan: Hush—

Alice: Let her talk. What does she know at all,—
Thinking crossed words between a man and a woman
Have anything to do with the heart? We have,
My man and I, more than a fretful mood
Can thief or touch. My man—I must go myself.

Joan: There is nothing you could do.

Sarah : 'Tis men
Should carry the dead man in.

Alice : My man
Is alive I say—surely my man's not dead—
Surely, I say—old woman, your croaking talk
Teases my brain like the pestilence out there
Till I doubt the thing I know. There's not a crag
Or a cleft of the hills but is natural to him

As the stairs beyond the door there—surely, surely—
Yet nothing is sure.

Sarah : Death has a way with him,
A confident way.

Alice : You know that he's not dead—
I know that too—if only that dark rage
Howling out there would leave tormenting me,
And let me reason it out in peace a little,
I could be quite, quite sure that he's not dead.

Sarah : Age is a quiet place where you can watch
The world bent with its pain and still be patient,
And warm your hands by the fire because you know
That the newest sorrow and the oldest sorrow are one.
They will bring him and put him down upon the floor :
Be ready for that, girl. There are times when hope is cruel
As a fancy-man that goes without good-bye.

Alice : I have a brain that is known in three shire-towns
For a level bargain. It is strange that I should be
Listening now to a cracked old woman's clatter
When my own thoughts for him should be so clear
That I shouldn't heed the words of another body.
I want no hope—only an easy space
To remember the skill of my man among the hills
And how he would surely match their cunning with his,—
Or else to count the hours that he's been gone
And see that his chance is whittled quite away.
To have a living thought against this fear
Is all I want—but those screaming devils there
Beat in my mind like the drums in Carnarvon streets

That they use when they want to cheat folk into thinking
That death is a handsome trade.—And so
I let a woman with none but leaky wits
Tell me the way I should be,—when most I need
To ride no borrowed sense.

Sarah : It is not wind,
For all it is louder than any flood on the hills,
Nor the crazy snow that maddens you till your brain
Is like three cats howling upon a wall,
But the darkness that comes creeping on a woman
When she knows of grief before it is spoken out.
And the sooner grieved is grief the sooner gone.
Be ready to make him decent for the grave.

Joan : If he should walk in now you will not forget
The trouble you are putting in the house with your talk.

Sarah : The trouble is here.

Alice : If he should walk in now—
Yes, that's the way to think. I'll work it out,
Slowly, his doings from when he left the door
Until he comes again. You stood at the oven
With cakes half-browned against his tea. And I
Stood here beside my man and strapped his coat
Under his chin. He looked across your way—
He is fond of you, child—he calls you Father Joan
Because—but that's not it—I told him then
To-morrow would be time to bring the slates,
And let him only mend the wire to-day—
He thought so too and said—it is like a beast
Greater than half the world and crushed in a trap,
Shrieking against the pain—what did he say?—

I have forgotten now, and I had begun
To follow it all quite clearly—what did he say ?

Joan : That an hour would see him back, and hungry too.

Alice : An hour would bring him back—but that is nothing—
I know it now : he went to the broken wire
And mended it—three quarters of an hour—
And then he would think that after all the slates
Were best bespoken now—six miles to go :
He would be about a mile when this began—
This wrath that will surely last till the Judgment Day—
And that would make two hours till he reached the quarry—
But he went on, and the neighbours up and down
Were scared and went out searching with their lanterns,
Like lighted gnats searching the mines of hell.
Isn't it queer to see them out there dancing
When all the time he has gone a twelve mile journey—
And then this old woman came with her neighbour duty—
It's odd folk are,—

Sarah : It's a poor thing, spinning tales
When there's no faith in them.

Alice : Hush, I have it all
Quite clearly now, in spite of that monster baying,—
Two hours to the quarry, hindered by the night,
Then half an hour to bargain, then two hours
For beating back, his boots heavy with snow,
Or a little longer—five hours and more all told—
It is nine o'clock—he went five hours ago,
Or a little more, so that's just how it works—
He should be coming now along the road,
Tired—we must warm the cakes again.

Sarah : Ay, warm them,
A dead man's heavy bearing.

The clock strikes nine.

Alice : That's the time
To bring him back, and we'll call the lanterns in—
He must be near by now—

A man is heard outside, kicking the snow off his boots. ALICE opens the door, and AN OLD MAN comes in, carrying an unlit lantern.

The Old Man : My candle is spent.

JOAN takes the lantern and fits a new candle while they speak.

Alice : And you are going out again ?
They have not found him ?

The Old Man : No. It's not easy there.

Alice : Then he didn't go to the quarry after all.

Joan : Because they hav'n't found him ? That's no sign.
They couldn't if he went.

Alice : Ah yes—how is it ?—
He went, and they've been looking on the hills—
But have not found him. Yes—he must have gone.
He should be back. You should have found him for me.

Sarah : She is strange because of the trouble in the house.
I am old, and that is something.

Alice : It is not that—
I am caught away from myself by the screaming thing
That scourges the hills. And yet in spite of that
I had reckoned all his doings since he went

Until his time for coming—but you came—
You came instead. That is not right.

The Old Man (taking the lantern and lighting it) : We'll send
Across to the quarry now—

Alice : It is no use—
He'll not have gone.

The Old Man : The night is full of tricks,
But another hour will have ferreted all the hill.

He goes out.

Sarah : Simon who took his money down to market
And wouldn't change for a good sound fact of cattle,
Fingered his earnings till a hole was worn
And came to the house again with an empty bag.
Leave making tales, my girl, poor tales—they bring no profit,
Keeping the truth outside, and breaking away
To a thimbleful of ash themselves. He is dead.
Think hard on that. When the old king of the world
With the scourge and flail turns his strokes from the wheat
On the goodman's floor and scars the goodman's back,
It is no time to wince. Your man is dead.
And a day and a day make Adam's fall a story.

Alice : Not down to the quarry—then—my little Joan,
Do you know at all what a man becomes to a woman ?
How should you though ? If a man should take
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands,
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall
Till strangers with money to travel came to praise it,

And, when he had dug and hewn and spent his years
To make it a wonder, should go, and be remembered
No more than an onion-pedlar in the street
By the gaping travellers, yet he might be glad,
If his heart was as big as a woman's, for the thing he'd made,
The strong and lovely thing, knowing it risen
Out of his thought into the talk of the world.
That's how it is. A woman takes a mate,
And like the patient builder governs him
Into the goodman known through a countryside,
Or the wise friend that the neighbours will seek out,
And he, for all his love, may never know
How she has nourished the dear fine mastery
That bids him daily down the busy road
And leaves her by the hearth. And when he is dead
It comes to her that the strength she has given him
To make him a gallant figure among them all
Has been the thing that has filled her, and she lonely,
Or gossiping with the folk, or about the house.

Sarah : When he is dead.

Alice : Why should I think of that ?
I am crazed, I say, because of the madness loosed
And beating against the panes. He is not dead—
You know it woman— Joan, it would be a lie
To say my man is dead ?

Joan : There, sister, wait—
It is all we can do—there is nothing else to do.

Sarah : When he is dead. Let the thought that comes unbidden
Be welcome, for it's the best thought. When he is dead.

Alice : There is treachery against us—my man—my dear—
My brave love—they are trying to part us now !
But we must be too strong when when he is dead

*There is a knock at the door. She
makes a half movement towards it.*

He would not knock. See who it is.

JOAN opens the door and a YOUNG
TRAVELLER, buffeted and breathless, comes
in.

The Stranger : By Thor !
There's beauty trampling men like crumpled leaves.
May I come in till it's gone ?

Joan : Surely.

The Stranger : I set
Every sinew taut against this power,
This supple torrent of might that suddenly rose
Out of the fallen dusk and sang and leapt
Like an athlete of the gods frenzied with wine.
It seemed to rear challenging against me,
As though the master from Valhalla's tables,
Grown heady in his revels, had cried out—
Behold me now crashing across the earth
To shake the colonies of antic men
Into a fear shall be a jest, my fellows !
And I measured myself against this bragging pride,
Climbing step by step through the blinding riot
Of frozen flakes swung on the cataract wind,
My veins praising the tyranny that was matched
Against this poor ambitious body of mine.

Alice : The storm is drenched with treachery and sin—
It is not good to praise it.

The Stranger : You on the hills
Grow dulled, maybe, to the royalty that finds
In your crooked world a thousand splendid hours,
And a storm to you is but a hindered task
Or a wall for mending or a gap in the flock.
But I was strange among this gaiety
Plying black looms in a black firmament,
This joy that was spilt out of the iron heavens
Where pity is not bidden to the hearts
Of the immaculate gods. I was a dream,
A cold monotony suddenly thrust
Into a waking world of lusty change,
A wizened death elected from the waste
To strive and mate with eager lords of tumult.
Beauty was winged about me, darkling speed
Took pressure of earth and smote against my face ;
I rode upon the front of heroic hours,
And once was on the crest of the world's tide,
Unseared as the elements.—But he mastered me,
That god striking a star for holiday,
And filled himself with great barbaric laughter
To see me slink away.

Alice : It is no god,
But a brainless anger, a gaunt and evil thing
That blame can't reach.

The Stranger : Not all have eyes to see.—
I'm harsh with my words, but I come from a harsh quarrel
With larger thews than man's.

Alice : Stranger, I'd give
Comely words to any who knocks at the door.
You are welcome—but leave your praising of this blight.
You safely gabbing of sly and cruel furies,
Like a child laughing before a cage of tigers.
You with your fancy talk of lords and gods
And your hero-veins—young man, do you know this night
Is eating through my bones into the marrow,
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,
And making my heart the oldest thing of any ?
Do you see those lights ?

The Stranger : They seemed odd moving there,
In a storm like this.

Alice : A man is lost on the hills.

The Stranger : That's bad. But who ?

Alice : My man is lost on the hills.

Sarah : She has it now ; her man is dead on the hills.

The Stranger : I talked amiss, not knowing of trouble here.
But why should he be dead ?

Alice : The woman is worn,
Her mind is worn, and she lives out of the world.
You ask at once as any wise man would.
I have told her and told and told that he's not dead,
And my young sister, too, though but a girl,
Says it, and she has a head beyond her years.
He is lost for an hour, or maybe for a night,
But never dead. That is the way you think ?
It is waiting that steals your proper sense away ;
And then, although you know, you let in fear

Blaspheming the thing you know—it is waiting to-night
In the midst of an idiot wrath drumming and drumming
Like a plague of bees in swarm above your eyes.
I do not know—I have not any strength
To fathom it now, and there is none to tell me.

Sarah: She knows it all, though the thing is hard to say.

Alice : Have done ! Young stranger, you have travelled the world
I think, or have grown learned in great cities,
And can tell the way things go—is it not wrong
To say that a man because of an ugly night
Should perish on his home-ground ? He would find a road
Out of a danger such as that, because
That is the way things happen—tell me now ?

The Stranger: It is likely that he would.

Alice : You hear that, Joan—
A traveller who has been in foreign dangers
And comes a scholar from a hundred cities
Says it is well, and that we must be patient.

The Stranger: No, I've not travelled, and I only say a man
Knowing the hills would likely weather a storm.

Alice: There, there—you must not take it back again,
Because you know, and you have said it is well.

Sarah : They cut a stone that is like a small church window,
And they carve a name and a line out of the book,
And when that's done there is nothing then to doubt.

The storm has suddenly cleared. The silence falls upon them strangely, and there is a pause.

Alice: It is spent at last. He will come from his shelter now.

My dear—come soon. Set the kettle again.

JOAN *does so. There is another pause.*

I have my thought again. It is an end.

I am broken. There is no pity anywhere.

The Stranger : The lights are coming.

Sarah : The anger never bates,

But scourges us till time betrays the limbs,

And strikes the tongue, and puts pence on the eyes,

And leaves the latch for stranger hands to lift.

*The blackness beyond the window has
given place to clear starlight on the hills.
A NUMBER OF MEN with lanterns pass by.
There is a knock : ALICE opens the door,
and THE OLD MAN stands there with his
lighted lantern. She looks at him, and
neither speaks. She turns away to the
table.*

Alice : Why have we waited . . . all this time . . . to know . . .

Her sorrow breaks over her.

THE END

To safety of the kerb he thrust the crone :
When a shaft took him in the back, and prone
He tumbled heavily, but all unheard
Amid the scurry of wheels that crashed and whirred
About his senseless head—his helmet crushed
Like crumpled paper by a car that rushed
Upon him unaware. And as he lay
He heard again the wheels he'd heard all day
About him on point-duty . . . only now
Each red-hot wheel ran searing over his brow—
A sizzling star with hub and spokes and tyre
One monstrous Catherine-wheel of sparking fire
Whirring down windy tunnels of the night . . .
That Catherine-wheel, somehow it will not light—
Fixed to the broken paling ; and the pin
Pricks the boy's finger as he jabs it in :
He sucks the salty blood—the spiteful thing
Fires, whizzing, sputtering sparks : he feels them sting
His wincing cheek ; and, on the damp night-air,
The stench of burnt saltpetre and singed hair . . .
While still he lies and listens without fear
To the loud traffic rumbling in his ear—
Wheels rumbling in his ear, and through his brain
For evermore, a never-ending train
Of scarlet postal-vans that whirl one red
Perpetual hot procession through his head—
His head that's just a clanking, clattering mill
Of grinding wheels . . . and down an endless hill
After his hoop he runs, a little lad,
Barefooted 'neath the stars, in nightshirt clad—
And stumbles into bed, the stars all gone,

Though in his head the hoop keeps running on
And on and on : his head grown big and wide
Holds all the windy night and stars inside . . .
And still within a hair's breadth of his ear
The crunch and gride of wheels rings sharp and clear,
Huge lumbering wagons, crusted axle-deep
With country marl, their drivers half-asleep
Against green toppling mounds of cabbages
Still crisp with dewy airs, or stacks of cheese
Smelling of Arcady, till all the sky
In clouds of cheese and cabbages rolls by—
Great golden cheeses wheeling through the night,
And giant cabbages of emerald light
That tumble after, scattering crystal drops . . .
While in his ear the grinding never stops—
Wheels grinding asphalt . . . then a high-piled wain
Of mignonette in boxes . . . and again,
A baby at his father's cottage-door
He toddles, treading on his pinafore,
And tumbles headlong in a bed of bloom,
Half smothered in the deep, sweet honeyed gloom
Of crushed, wet blossom ; and the hum of bees—
Big bumble-bees that buzz through flowery trees—
Grows furious . . . changing to a roar of wheels
And honk of hooting horns : and now he feels
That all the cars in London filled with light
Are bearing down upon him through the night,
As out of hall and theatre there pour
White-shouldered women, ever more and more,
Bright-eyed, with flashing teeth, borne in a throng
Of purring, glittering cars, ten thousand strong :

Each drowsy dame and eager chattering lass
Laughing unheard within her box of glass . . .
And then great darkness, and a clanging bell—
Clanging beneath the hollow dome of hell
Aglow like burnished copper ; and a roar
Of wheels and wheels and wheels for evermore,
As engine after engine crashes by
With clank and rattle under that red sky,
Dropping a trail of burning coals behind,
That scorch his eyeballs till he lies half-blind,
Smouldering to cinder in a vasty night
Of wheeling worlds and stars in whirring flight,
And suns that blaze in thunderous fury on
For ever and for ever, yet are gone
Ere he can gasp to see them . . . head to heels
Slung round a monstrous red-hot hub, that wheels
Across infinity, with spokes of fire
That dwindle slowly till the shrinking tyre
Is clamped like aching ice about his head . . .

He smells clean acid smells : and safe in bed
He wakens in a lime-washed ward, to hear
Somebody moaning almost in his ear,
And knows that it's himself that moans : and then,
Battling his way back to the world of men,
He sees with leaden eyelids opening wide,
His young wife gravely knitting by his side.

SCENE : The big tent-stable of a travelling circus. On the ground near the entrance, GENTLEMAN JOHN, stableman and general odd-job man, lies smoking beside MERRY ANDREW, the clown. GENTLEMAN JOHN is a little hunched man with a sensitive face and dreamy eyes. MERRY ANDREW, who is resting between the afternoon and evening performances, with his clown's hat lying beside him, wears a crimson wig, and a baggy suit of orange-coloured cotton, patterned with purple cats. His face is chalked dead white, and painted with a set grin, so that it is impossible to see what manner of man he is. In the background are camels and elephants feeding, dimly visible in the steamy dusk of the tent.

Gentleman John : And then consider camels : only think
Of camels long enough, and you'd go mad—
With all their humps and lumps ; their knobbly knees,
Splay feet, and straddle legs ; their sagging necks,
Flat flanks, and scraggy tails, and monstrous teeth.
I've not forgotten the first fiend I met :
'Twas in a lane in Smyrna, just a ditch
Between the shuttered houses, and so narrow
The brute's bulk blocked the road ; the huge green stack
Of dewy fodder that it slouched beneath
Brushing the yellow walls on either hand,
And shutting out the strip of burning blue :
And I'd to face that vicious bobbing head
With evil eyes, slack lips, and nightmare teeth,
And duck beneath the snaky squirming neck,
Pranked with its silly string of bright blue beads,
That seemed to wriggle every way at once,
As though it were a hydra. Allah's beard !
But I was scared, and nearly turned and ran.
I felt that muzzle take me by the scruff,
And heard those murderous teeth crunching my spine,

Before I stooped—though I dodged safely under.
I've always been afraid of ugliness :
I'm such a toad myself, I hate all toads ;
And the camel is the ugliest toad of all
To my mind ; and it's just my devil's luck
I've come to this—to be a camel's lackey,
To fetch and carry for original sin ;
For, sure enough, the camel's old evil incarnate.
Blue beads and amulets to ward off evil !
No eye's more evil than a camel's eye.
The elephant is quite a comely beast,
Compared with Satan camel,—trunk and all,
His floppy ears, and his insequent tail.
He's stolid, but, at least, a gentleman.
It does not hurt my pride to valet him,
And bring his shaving-water. He's a lord.
Only the bluest blood that has come down
Through generations from the mastodon
Could carry off that tail with dignity,
That tail and trunk. He cannot look absurd,
For all the monkey tricks you put him through,
Your paper hoops and popguns. He just makes
His masters look ridiculous, when his pomp's
Butchered to make a bumpkin's holiday.
He's dignity itself, and proper pride,
That stands serenely in a circus-world
Of mountebanks and monkeys. He has weight
Behind him : æons of primeval power
Have shaped that pillared bulk ; and he stands sure,
Solid, substantial on the world's foundations.
And he has form, form that's too big a thing

To be called beauty. Once, long since, I thought
To be a poet, and shape words, and mould
A poem like an elephant, huge, sublime,
To front oblivion : and because I failed,
And all my rhymes were gawky, shambling camels,
Or else obscene, blue-buttocked apes, I'm doomed
To lackey it for things such as I've made,
Till one of them crunches my back-bone with his teeth,
Or knocks my wind out with a forthright kick
Clean in the midriff : crumpling up in death
The hunched and stunted body that was me,
John, the apostle of the Perfect Form !
Jerusalem ! I'm talking—like a book,
As you would say : and a bad book at that,
A maundering, kiss-mammy book—The Hunchback's End
Or The Camel-Keeper's Reward—would be the title.
I froth and bubble like a new-broached cask.
No wonder you look glum, for all your grin.
What makes you mope ? You've naught to growse about.
You've got no hump. Your body's brave and straight—
So shapely even that you can afford
To trick it in fantastic shapelessness,
Knowing that there's a clean-limbed man beneath
Preposterous pantaloons and purple cats.
I would have been a poet, if I could :
But better than shaping poems 'twould have been,
To have had a comely body and clean limbs
Obedient to my bidding.

Merry Andrew : I missed a hoop
This afternoon.

Gentleman John : You missed a hoop ? You mean . . .

Merry Andrew : That I am done, used up, scrapped, on the shelf,
Out of the running—only that, no more.

Gentleman John : Well, I've been missing hoops my whole life
[long ;

Though, when I come to think of it, perhaps
There's little consolation to be chewed
From crumbs that I can offer.

Merry Andrew : I've not missed
A hoop since I was six. I'm forty-two.
This is the first time that my body's failed me :
But 'twill not be the last. And . . .

Gentleman John : Such is life !
You're going to say. You see I've got it pat,
Your jaded wheeze. Lord, what a wit I'd make
If I'd a set grin painted on my face.
And such is life, I'd say a hundred times,
And each time set the world aroar afresh
At my original humour. Missed a hoop !
Why, man alive, you've naught to grumble at.
I've boggled every hoop since I was six.
I'm fifty-five ; and I've run round a ring
Would make this potty circus seem a pinhole.
I wasn't born to sawdust. I'd the world
For circus . . .

Merry Andrew : It's no time for crowing now.
I know a gentleman, and take on trust
The silver spoon and all. My teeth were cut
Upon a horseshoe : and I wasn't born
To purple and fine linen—but to sawdust,

To sawdust, as you say—brought up on sawdust.
I've had to make my daily bread of sawdust :
Ay, and my children's,—children's, that's the rub,
As Shakespeare says . . .

Gentleman John : Ah, there you go again !
What a rare wit to set the ring aroar—
As Shakespeare says ! Crowing ? A gentleman ?
Man, didn't you say you'd never missed a hoop ?
It's only gentlemen who miss no hoops,
Clean-livers, easy lords of life who take
Each obstacle at a leap, who never fail.
You are the gentleman.

Merry Andrew : Now don't you try
Being funny at my expense ; or you'll soon find
I'm not quite done for yet—not quite snuffed out.
There's still a spark of life. You may have words :
But I've a fist will be a match for them.
Words slaver feebly from a broken jaw.
I've always lived straight, as a man must do
In my profession, if he'd keep in fettle :
But I'm no gentleman, for I fail to see
There's any sport in baiting a poor man
Because he's losing grip at forty-two,
And sees his livelihood slipping from his grasp—
Ay, and his children's bread.

Gentleman John : Why, man alive,
Who's baiting you ? This winded, broken cur,
That limps through life, to bait a bull like you !
You don't want pity, man ! The beaten bull,
Even when the dogs are tearing at his gullet,

Turns no eye up for pity. I myself,
Crippled and hunched and twisted as I am,
Would make a brave fend to stand up to you
Until you swallowed your words, if you should slobber
Your pity over me. A bull! Nay, man,
You're nothing but a bear with a sore head.
A bee has stung you—you who've lived on honey.
Sawdust, forsooth! You've had the sweet of life:
You've munched the honeycomb till . . .

Merry Andrew: Ay, talk's cheap.
But you've no children. You don't understand.

Gentleman John: I have no children: I don't understand!

Merry Andrew: It's children make the difference.

Gentleman John: Man alive—
Alive and kicking, though you're shamming dead—
You've hit the truth at last. It's that, just that,
Makes all the difference. If you hadn't children,
I'd find it in my heart to pity you,
Granted you'd let me. I don't understand!
I've seen you stripped. I've seen your children stripped.
You've never seen me naked; but you can guess
The misstitched, gnarled, and crooked thing I am.
Now, do you understand? I may have words.
But you, man, do you never burn with pride
That you've begotten those six limber bodies,
Firm flesh, and supple sinew, and lithe limb—
Six nimble lads, each like young Absalom,
With red blood running lively in his veins,
Bone of your bone, your very flesh and blood?
It's you don't understand. God, what I'd give

This moment to be you, just as you are,
Preposterous pantaloons and purple cats
And painted leer and crimson curls and all,
To be you now, with only one missed hoop,
If I'd six clean-limbed children of my loins,
Born of the ecstasy of life within me,
To keep it quick and valiant in the ring
When I . . . but I . . . Man, man, you've missed a hoop :
But they'll take every hoop like blooded colts :
And 'twill be you in them that leaps through life,
And in their children, and their children's children.
God ! doesn't it make you hold your breath to think
There'll always be an Andrew in the ring,
The very spit and image of you stripped,
While life's old circus lasts ? And I . . . at least
There is no twisted thing of my begetting
To keep my shame alive : and that's the most
That I've to pride myself upon. But, God,
I'm proud, ay, proud as Lucifer, of that.
Think what it means, with all the urge and sting,
When such a lust of life runs in the veins.
You, with your six sons, and your one missed hoop,
Put that thought in your pipe, and smoke it. Well,
And how d'you like the flavour ? Something bitter ?
And burns the tongue a trifle ? That's the brand
That I must smoke while I've the breath to puff.

(*pause.*)

I've always worshipped the body, all my life—
The body quick with the perfect health which is beauty,
Lively, lissom, alert, and taking its way
Through the world with the easy gait of the early Gods.

The only moments I've lived my life to the full
And that live again in remembrance unfaded are those
When I've seen life compact in some perfect body,
The living God made manifest in man :
A diver in the Mediterranean, resting,
With sleeked black hair, and glistening salt-tanned skin,
Gripping the quivering gunwale with tense hands,
His torso lifted out of the peacock sea,
Like Neptune, carved in amber, come to life :
A stark Egyptian on the Nile's edge poised
Like a bronze Osiris against the lush, rank green :
A fisherman dancing reels, on New Year's Eve,
In a hall of shadowy rafters and flickering lights,
At St. Abbs on the Berwickshire coast, to the skirl of the pipes,
The lift of the wave in his heels, the sea in his veins :
A Cherokee Indian, as though he were one with his horse,
His coppery shoulders a gleam, his feathers aflame
With the last of the sun, descending a gulch in Alaska :
A brawny Cleveland puddler, stripped to the loins,
On the cauldron's brink, stirring the molten iron
In the white-hot glow, a man of white-hot metal :
A Cornish ploughboy driving an easy share
Through the grey, light soil of a headland, against a sea
Of sapphire, gay in his new white corduroys,
Blue-eyed, dark-haired, and whistling a careless tune :
Jack Johnson, stripped for the ring, in his swarthy pride
Of sleek and rippling muscle . . .

Merry Andrew : . . . Jack's the boy !
Ay, he's the proper figure of a man.
But he'll grow fat and flabby and scant of breath.
He'll miss his hoop some day.

Gentleman John : But what are words
To shape the joy of form? The Greeks did best,
To cut in marble or to cast in bronze
Their ecstasy of living. I remember
A marvellous Hermes that I saw in Athens,
Fished from the very bottom of the deep
Where he had lain, two thousand years or more,
Wrecked with a galley-full of Roman pirates,
Among the white bones of his plunderers,
Whose flesh had fed the fishes as they sank—
Serene in cold, imperishable beauty,
Biding his time till he should rise again,
Exultant from the wave, for all men's worship,
The morning-spring of life, the youth of the world,
Shaped in sea-coloured bronze for everlasting.
Ay, the Greeks knew : but men have forgotten now.
Not easily do we meet beauty walking
The world to-day in all the body's pride.
That's why I'm here—a stable-boy to camels—
For in the circus-ring there's more delight
Of seemly bodies, goodly in sheer health,
Bodies trained and tuned to the perfect pitch,
Eager, blithe, debonair, from head to heel
Aglow and alive in every pulse, than elsewhere
In this machine-ridden land of grimy, glum
Round-shouldered, coughing mechanics. Once I lived
In London, in a slum called Paradise,
Sickened to see the greasy pavements crawling
With puny flabby babies, thick as maggots.
Poor brats ! I'd soon go mad, if I'd to live

In London with its stunted men and women
But little better to look on than myself.
Yet, there's an island where the men keep fit—
St. Kilda's, a stark fastness of high crag :
They must keep fit or famish : their main food
The Solan goose ; and it's a chancy job
To climb down a sheer face of slippery granite
And drop a noose over the sentinel bird
Ere he can squawk to rouse the sleeping flock.
They must keep fit—their bodies taut and trim—
To have the nerve : and they're like tempered steel,
Suppled and fined. But even they've grown slacker
Through traffic with the mainland, in these days.
A hundred years ago, the custom held
That none should take a wife, till he had stood,
His left heel on the dizziest point of crag,
His right leg and both arms stretched in mid-air,
Above the sea : three hundred feet to drop
To death, if he should fail—a Spartan test.
But any man who could have failed, would scarce
Have earned his livelihood, or his children's bread
On that bleak rock.

Merry Andrew : (drowsily) Ay, children—that's it, children !

Gentleman John : St. Kilda's children had a chance, at least,
With none begotten idly of weakling fathers.
A Spartan test for fatherhood ! Should they miss
Their hoop, 'twas death—and childless. You have still
Six lives to take unending hoops for you,
And you yourself are not done yet . . .

Merry Andrew (more drowsily) : Not yet,
And there's much comfort in the thought of children.

They're bonnie boys enough, and should do well,
If I can but keep going a little while,
A little longer till . . .

Gentleman John : Six strapping sons !
And I have naught but camels.

(*pause.*)

Yet, I've seen

A vision in this stable that puts to shame
Each ecstasy of mortal flesh and blood
That's been my eyes' delight. I never breathed
A word of it to man or woman yet :
I couldn't whisper it now to you, if you looked
Like any human thing this side of death.
'Twas on the night I stumbled on the circus.
I'd wandered all day, lost among the fells,
Over snow-smothered hills, through blinding blizzard,
Whipped by a wind that seemed to strip and skin me,
Till I was one numb ache of sodden ice.
Quite done, and drunk with cold, I'd soon have dropped
Dead in a ditch, when suddenly a lantern
Dazzled my eyes. I smelt a queer warm smell ;
And felt a hot puff in my face ; and blundered
Out of the flurry of snow and raking wind
Dizzily into a glowing Arabian night
Of elephants and camels having supper.
I thought that I'd gone mad, stark, staring mad :
But I was much too sleepy to mind just then—
Dropped dead-asleep upon a truss of hay ;
And lay, a log, till—well, I cannot tell
How long I lay unconscious. I but know
I slept, and wakened : and that 'twas no dream.

I heard a rustle in the hay beside me ;
And opening sleepy eyes, scarce marvelling,
I saw her, standing naked in the lamplight,
Beneath the huge tent's cavernous canopy,
Against the throng of elephants and camels
That champed unwondering in the golden dusk,
Moon-white Diana, mettled Artemis—
Her body quick and tense as her own bowstring—
Her spirit, an arrow barbed and strung for flight—
White snow-flakes melting on her night-black hair,
And on her glistening breasts and supple thighs :
Her red lips parted, her keen eyes alive
With fierce, far-ranging hungers of the chase
Over the hills of morn . . . The lantern guttered :
And I was left alone in the outer darkness
Among the champing elephants and camels.
And I'll be a camel-keeper to the end :
Though never again my eyes . . .

(*pause.*)

So, you can sleep,

You Merry Andrew, for all you missed your hoop.
It's just as well, perhaps. Now I can hold
My secret to the end. Ah, here they come !

*(Six lads, between the ages of three and twelve, clad in pink
tights covered with silver spangles, tumble into the tent.)*

The Eldest Boy : Daddy, the bell's rung, and . . .

Gentleman John :

He's snoozing sound.

(to the youngest boy)

You just creep quietly, and take tight hold
Of the crimson curls, and tug, and you will hear
The purple pussies all caterwaul at once.

Night had squander'd over the glowing air
The thousands of her stars. A slender woman—
Sure-foot treading the path her childhood knew—
Smiled at them as she went, in haste for home
After the long day of a widow's toil ;
Her tired body loving the thought of sleep,
But her heart planning eager things. She seemed
To face the loft of splendours, as her mind
Would match itself with the exulting blue
That owns the treasures of eternal light :

“ A little piece of life that time has taken
Into his hands, and soon will have it squared
To lie still in the work he builds for ever,
As men make stones the size for masonry ;
The little life and the few years I am
Might stand beside you in your glorying,
And it would not be boldness. I can declare
A spirit of desire that has its range
Endless as you, O blue depths of the darkness,
You in whom space is perfect ; and the glee
That I can make will mock your whitest stars.
You cannot look me down, you everlasting :
Death is as measureless as you, and I
Am love that fills the greatness of death full
Of burning never to be alight, as dark
As your blue burns ; and in the midst I am
Shining love whose motion is faultless flame
Measured in starry flights of living joy—
Still kindling new radiant attendance round
My little laughing son, the life my lover

Required, when I was worshipt by his beauty.
O night, infinite room of fire rejoicing,
I know where you are equalled, I that am
Love for a lover dead and a son living ! ”

By this there should have been a golden eye
Of candlelight watching for her approach,
The gleaming window that would seem her hour
Of joy looking to take her back again.
But there was only night in front of her :
The house was dark and noiseless, a strange bulk
Of blacker night, filled with quieter silence ;
And she was nothing to it ; it had lost
All that it was in some great lonely passion
It could not share ; and would not heed aught else :
So blank it stood, a rapt thing. She was quick
To push the door wide, and stand listening
Within the walls. Instantly on her mind
The sense of outdoor darkness, with the world
Eased of its weight, alter'd to graver darkness
Pressing down as thick as deep-sea water,
A load of darkness ; yet not so quickly changed
She could not feel the mood in the noiseless house
For a tick of her heart shudder and shrink off
When the latch rapt and her movement stirred against it ;
Then settle back and close over her brain.

But joy was eager in her, and drew in
These swerving motions of her thought. She bent
To peer into the room, and held her arms
Ready to catch the boy running to her.

“ You are both very still ! Is this to be

A hiding game? Where are you, little knave?
Laugh, little deceiver: I'll track your voice
Home to its darling breast. Out with a jump,
You minim of the rogues, and frighten me!—
Mother, where is he? What's my sweetheart doing?—
Where are you, mother?—Gone? they can't be gone!”

She started forward; but her mother's voice
Came very quiet from the back of the room
And held her, as though it took her by the soul.

“Be careful. Make a light before you move,
Else you may stumble.”

“It must be near you,
The tinder-box! Has some harm come to him?
Quick, mother, strike!”

“Near me, yes; I forgot.
Do not come in: wait for the light; or else
You may trip. I have been sitting here so long,
So long, I have almost stiffen'd into an image.
But wait: the cramp's against my hurrying.
And I'm not ready for you yet; just now
I tried to make out what I ought to say.”

“He is hurt then? Have you put him to bed?”

“Wait, wait, girl; stay there, or you'll now it glows;
My hands were shivering more than I knew.
Now for the candle: eh, my fingers are
A palsy, or doddering ague. Now I hope
God will be with your heart as well as mine.”

The light grew round the flame, a golden mist
Hanging confused with darkness rather than light.
And when the room was full of it, she saw

Where her boy lay ; right at her feet he lay,
Naked, with open eyes, speared in the breast.

Her throat lockt terribly on her shrieking breath.
When her stunn'd heart felt its fearful beating,
And blacken'd mind awoke to dazzling anguish,
She heard her mother speaking, as talk sounds
Floating out of a window very high up.

" It was the soldiers. They had made them drunk ;
And some were laughing drunk ; but most were wild,
Like men who keep a shouting fury up
For fear they'll be afraid ; and there was one
Who cried and cried like broken-hearted madness.
' I can't be doing this,' he said, ' not this ;'
And it was he that snatcht the boy from me.
And then the laughers and the swearers ran
Out of the house like men escaping fire,
Laughing and swearing still : and he alone
Stayed crying here, and looking on his work,
And saying still, ' I can't do things like this ! ' "

" But why ? why ? What has come to the world ? "

" Messiah has come. The world is to be saved. "

" Will you jeer at me ? A Messiah who leaves
My baby to the fiends, and saves the world ?
Is it the time for that talk ? Will the dreams
That comforted old men posed with the world
Have any quiet for me ? And were they truth
Blazed on the world, they would not alter this ! "

" As well as I could learn it, there's no tale
Now of the Lord riding down the heathen
Sudden as thunder among them, and the Jews

To follow singing after his amazement.
The tale is nothing of that, but of a baby
Born in Jewry, none knows where, and likely
When he is grown—they say 'tis sworn in the stars—
To pull the power of the king clattering down ;
Because his mind will be the mind of God,
And he will change men's lives, so that they break
The world about them like an evil habit,
And make a new world out of righteousness :
'Tis so my thought pieces the broken tale.
But the king will not have the world so changed,
And all the Jewish boys are to be killed.
The fool ! Let there be blood from here to Rome,
Our God will hide Messiah from his steel,
The world will be new made after God's heart."

" O be quiet ! I do not want the world
New made after God's heart ; I want my boy
Alive and laughing, my little nimble boy !
Why need the world be changed at all ? We two,
I and my boy, would have delighted in it ;
We would have stood in midst of the great world
And filled ourselves full of the sense of it :
The burning days and forces of the night,
Guarding man's living passion like a king
Taken captive and striding an endless road ;
We would have stood in midst of the great joy
And the great sorrow of being in the world
And gloried in it, like musicians standing
In midst of the sound of their own mastery.—
But she must murder him with her Messiah,

That woman ! For the sake of pampering
The brainsick lives that dare not love the world,
He must be murder'd, my happy little dancer ;
And the bright world that played with him so gay
Must turn against him in a hideous flash
Of agony, and strike him dark for ever :
O my darling, blinded and cold for ever !—
What will your world, new made after God's heart,
Offer my heart, to make this good to me ?—
It may be holiness thriving up to heaven,
'Twill not be rid of me ; I'll be its shame ;
I'll haunt it ; it shall hear me cry in its ears. . . .”

(To E. M.)

He was a man with wide and patient eyes,
Gray, like the drift of twitch-fires blown in June,
That, without fearing, searched if any wrong
Might threaten from your heart. Gray eyes he had
Under a brow was drawn because he knew
So many seasons to so many pass
Of upright service, loyal, unabased
Before the world seducing, and so, barren
Of good words praising and thought that mated his.
He carved in stone. Out of his quiet life
He watched as any faithful seaman charged
With tidings of the myriad faring sea,
And thoughts and premonitions through his mind
Sailing as ships from strange and storied lands
His hungry spirit held, till all they were
Found living witness in the chiselled stone.
Slowly out of the dark confusion, spread
By life's innumerable venturings
Over his brain, he would triumph into the light
Of one clear mood, unblemished of the blind
Legions of errant thought that cried about
His rapt seclusion: as a pearl unsoiled,
Nay, rather washed to lonelier chastity,
In gritty mud. And then would come a bird,
A flower, or the wind moving upon a flower,
A beast at pasture, or a clustered fruit,
A peasant face as were the saints of old,
The leer of custom, or the bow of the moon
Swung in miraculous poise—some stray from the world
Of things created by the eternal mind

In joy articulate. And his perfect mood
Would dwell about the token of God's mood,
Until in bird or flower or moving wind
Or flock or shepherd or the troops of heaven
It sprang in one fierce moment of desire
To visible form.
Then would his chisel work among the stone,
Persuading it of petal or of limb
Or starry curve, till risen anew there sang
Shape out of chaos, and again the vision
Of one mind single from the world was pressed
Upon the daily custom of the sky
Or field or the body of man.

His people

Had many gods for worship. The tiger-god,
The owl, the dewlapped bull, the running pard,
The camel and the lizard of the slime,
The ram with quivering fleece and fluted horn,
The crested eagle and the doming bat
Were sacred. And the king and his high priests
Decreed a temple, wide on columns huge,
Should top the cornlands to the sky's far line.
They bade the carvers carve along the walls
Images of their gods, each one to carve
As he desired, his choice to name his god. . . .
And many came; and he among them, glad
Of three leagues' travel through the singing air
Of dawn among the boughs yet bare of green,
The eager flight of the spring leading his blood
Into swift lofty channels of the air,

Proud as an eagle riding to the sun. . . .
An eagle, clean of pinion—there's his choice.

Daylong they worked under the growing roof,
One at his leopard, one the staring ram,
And he winning his eagle from the stone,
Until each man had carved one image out,
Arow beyond the portal of the house.
They stood arow, the company of gods,
Camel and bat, lizard and bull and ram,
The pard and owl, dead figures on the wall,
Figures of habit driven on the stone
By chisels governed by no heat of the brain
But drudges of hands that moved by easy rule.
Proudly recorded mood was none, no thought
Plucked from the dark battalions of the mind
And throned in everlasting sight. But one
God of them all was witness of belief
And large adventure dared. His eagle spread
Wide pinions on a cloudless ground of heaven,
Glad with the heart's high courage of that dawn
Moving upon the ploughlands newly sown,
Dead stone the rest. He looked, and knew it so.

Then came the king with priests and counsellors
And many chosen of the people, wise
With words weary of custom, and eyes askew
That watched their neighbour face for any news
Of the best way of judgment, till, each sure
None would determine with authority,
All spoke in prudent praise. One liked the owl

Because an owl blinked on the beam of his barn.
One, hoarse with crying gospels in the street,
Praised most the ram, because the common folk
Wore breeches made of ram's wool. One declared
The tiger pleased him best,—the man who carved
The tiger-god was halt out of the womb—
A man to praise, being so pitiful.
And one, whose eyes dwelt in a distant void,
With spell and omen pat upon his lips,
And a purse for any crystal prophet ripe,
A zealot of the mist, gazed at the bull—
A lean ill-shapen bull of meagre lines
That scarce the steel had graved upon the stone—
Saying that here was very mystery
And truth, did men but know. And one there was
Who praised his eagle, but remembering
The lither pinion of the swift, the curve
That liked him better of the mirrored swan.
And they who carved the tiger-god and ram,
The camel and the pard, the owl and bull,
And lizard, listened greedily, and made
Humble denial of their worthiness,
And when the king his royal judgment gave
That all had fashioned well, and bade that each
Re-shape his chosen god along the walls
Till all the temple boasted of their skill,
They bowed themselves in token that as this
Never had carvers been so fortunate.

Only the man with wide and patient eyes
Made no denial, neither bowed his head.

Already while they spoke his thought had gone
Far from his eagle, leaving it for a sign
Loyally wrought of one deep breath of life,
And played about the image of a toad
That crawled among his ivy leaves. A queer
Puff-bellied toad, with eyes that always stared
Sidelong at heaven and saw no heaven there,
Weak-hammed, and with a throttle somehow twisted
Beyond full wholesome draughts of air, and skin
Of wrinkled lips, the only zest or will
The little flashing tongue searching the leaves.
And king and priest, chosen and counsellor,
Babbling out of their thin and jealous brains,
Seemed strangely one; a queer enormous toad
Panting under giant leaves of dark,
Sunk in the loins, peering into the day.
Their judgment wry he counted not for wrong
More than the fabled poison of the toad
Striking at simple wits; how should their thought
Or word in praise or blame come near the peace
That shone in seasonable hours above
The patience of his spirit's husbandry?
They foolish and not seeing, how should he
Spend anger there or fear—great ceremonies
Equal for none save great antagonists?
The grave indifference of his heart before them
Was moved by laughter innocent of hate,
Chastising clean of spite, that moulded them
Into the antic likeness of his toad
Bidding for laughter underneath the leaves.

He bowed not, nor disputed, but he saw
Those ill-created joyless gods, and loathed,
And saw them creeping, creeping round the walls,
Death breeding death, wile witnessing to wile,
And sickened at the dull iniquity
Should be rewarded, and for ever breathe
Contagion on the folk gathered in prayer.
His truth should not be doomed to march among
This falsehood to the ages. He was called,
And he must labour there ; if so the king
Would grant it, where the pillars bore the roof
A galleried way of meditation nursed
Secluded time, with wall of ready stone
In panels for the carver set between
The windows—there his chisel should be set,—
It was his plea. And the king spoke of him,
Scorning, as one lack-fettle, among all these
Eager to take the riches of renown ;
One fearful of the light or knowing nothing
Of light's dimension, a witling who would throw
Honour aside and praise spoken aloud
All men of heart should covet. Let him go
Grubbing out of the sight of these who knew
The worth of substance ; there was his proper trade.

A squat and curious toad indeed. . . . The eyes,
Patient and grey, were dumb as were the lips,
That, fixed and governed, hoarded from them all
The larger laughter lifting in his heart.
Straightway about his gallery he moved,
Measured the windows and the virgin stone,

Till all was weighed and patterned in his brain.
Then first where most the shadow struck the wall,
Under the sills, and centre of the base,
From floor to sill out of the stone was wooed
Memorial folly, as from the chisel leapt
His chastening laughter searching priest and king—
A huge and wrinkled toad, with legs asplay,
And belly loaded, leering with great eyes
Busily fixed upon the void.

All days

His chisel was the first to ring across
The temple's quiet; and at fall of dusk
Passing among the carvers homeward, they
Would speak of him as mad, or weak against
The challenge of the world, and let him go
Lonely, as was his will, under the night
Of stars or cloud or summer's folded sun,
Through crop and wood and pastureland to sleep.
None took the narrow stair as wondering
How did his chisel prosper in the stone,
Unvisited his labour and forgot.
And times when he would lean out of his height
And watch the gods growing along the walls,
The row of carvers in their linen coats
Took in his vision a virtue that alone
Carving they had not nor the thing they carved.
Knowing the health that flowed about his close
Imagining, the daily quiet won
From process of his clean and supple craft,
Those carvers there, far on the floor below,

Would haply be transfigured in his thought
Into a gallant company of men
Glad of the strict and loyal reckoning
That proved in the just presence of the brain
Each chisel-stroke. How surely would he prosper
In pleasant talk at easy hours with men
So fashioned if it might be—and his eyes
Would pass again to those dead gods that grew
In spreading evil round the temple walls ;
And, one dead pressure made, the carvers moved
Along the wall to mould and mould again
The self-same god, their chisels on the stone
Tapping in dull precision as before,
And he would turn, back to his lonely truth.

He carved apace. And first his people's gods,
About the toad, out of their sterile time,
Under his hand thrilled and were recreate.
The bull, the pard, the camel and the ram,
Tiger and owl and bat—all were the signs
Visibly made body on the stone
Of sightless thought adventuring the host
That is mere spirit ; these the bloom achieved
By secret labour in the flowing wood
Of rain and air and wind and continent sun. . . .
His tiger, lithe, immobile in the stone,
A swift destruction for a moment leashed,
Sprang crying from the jealous stealth of men
Opposed in cunning watch, with engines hid
Of torment and calamitous desire.
His leopard, swift on lean and paltry limbs,

Was fear in flight before accusing faith.
His bull, with eyes that often in the dusk
Would lift from the sweet meadow grass to watch
Him homeward passing, bore on massy beam
The burden of the patient of the earth.
His camel bore the burden of the damned,
Being gaunt, with eyes aslant along the nose.
He had a friend, who hammered bronze and iron
And cupped the moonstone on a silver ring,
One constant like himself, would come at night
Or bid him as a guest, when they would make
Their poets touch a starrier height, or search
Together with unparsimonious mind
The crowded harbours of mortality.
And there were jests, wholesome as harvest ale,
Of homely habit, bred of hearts that dared
Judgment of laughter under the eternal eye:
This frolic wisdom was his carven owl.
His ram was lordship on the lonely hills,
Alert and fleet, content only to know
The wind mightily pouring on his fleece,
With yesterday and all unrisen suns
Poorer than disinherited ghosts. His bat
Was ancient envy made a mockery,
Cowering below the newer eagle carved
Above the arches with wide pinion spread,
His faith's dominion of that happy dawn.

And so he wrought the gods upon the wall,
Living and crying out of his desire,
Out of his patient incorruptible thought,

Wrought them in joy was wages to his faith.
And other than the gods he made. The stalks
Of bluebells heavy with the news of spring,
The vine loaded with plenty of the year,
And swallows, merely tenderness of thought
Bidding the stone to small and fragile flight ;
Leaves, the thin relics of autumnal boughs,
Or massed in June. . . .
All from their native pressure bloomed and sprang
Under his shaping hand into a proud
And governed image of the central man,—
Their moulding, charts of all his travelling.
And all were deftly ordered, duly set
Between the windows, underneath the sills,
And roofward, as a motion rightly planned,
Till on the wall, out of the sullen stone,
A glory blazed, his vision manifest,
His wonder captive. And he was content.

And when the builders and the carvers knew
Their labour done, and high the temple stood
Over the cornlands, king and counsellor
And priest and chosen of the people came
Among a ceremonial multitude
To dedication. And, below the thrones
Where king and archpriest ruled above the throng,
Highest among the ranked artificers
The carvers stood. And when, the temple vowed
To holy use, tribute and choral praise
Given as was ordained, the king looked down
Upon the gathered folk, and bade them see

The comely gods fashioned about the walls,
And keep in honour men whose precious skill
Could so adorn the sessions of their worship,
Gravely the carvers bowed them to the ground.

Only the man with wide and patient eyes
Stood not among them ; nor did any come
To count his labour, where he watched alone
Above the coloured throng. He heard, and looked
Again upon his work, and knew it good,
Smiled on his toad, passed down the stair unseen,
And sang across the teeming meadows home.

When colour goes home into the eyes,
And lights that shine are shut again
With dancing girls and sweet birds' cries
Behind the gateways of the brain ;
And that no-place which gave them birth, shall close
The rainbow and the rose :—

Still may Time hold some golden space
Where I'll unpack that scented store
Of song and flower and sky and face,
And count, and touch, and turn them o'er,
Musing upon them ; as a mother, who
Has watched her children all the rich day through,
Sits, quiet-handed, in the fading light,
When children sleep, ere night.

I

PEACE

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love !

Oh ! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath ;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending ;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

II

SAFETY

Dear! of all happy in the hour, most blest
 He who has found our hid security,
Assured in the dark tides of the world that rest,
 And heard our word, "Who is so safe as we?"
We have found safety with all things undying,
 The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
 And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal earth.
We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing.
 We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
 Secretly armed against all death's endeavour;
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

III

THE DEAD.

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead !
 There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
 But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away ; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth ; gave up the years to be
 Of work and joy, and that unhopèd serene,
 That men call age ; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow ! They brought us, for our dearth,
 Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
 And paid his subjects with a royal wage ;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again ;
 And we have come into our heritage.

IV

THE DEAD

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
 Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
 And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movement, and heard music; known
 Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
 Touched flowers and furs, and cheeks. All this is ended.

There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
 Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
 Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.

V

THE SOLDIER

If I should die, think only this of me :

That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed ;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given ;
Her sights and sounds ; dreams happy as her day ;
And laughter, learnt of friends ; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

A small room in an empty cottage, without furniture. Stone floor ; dirty ragged paper on walls. The room is littered with bits of sawn wood, shavings, tools ; a joiner's frail lies on the floor. Door to the open air on right ; in the back wall an old kitchen range, with a good fire burning. A young joiner is alone in the room ; he has been putting in a new staircase, which is all but finished ; the new wood, clean and white, shows up amid the dingy room.

The Joiner (looking at his work : in a sort of chant)

Hammer and nails, gimlet and screws,
Bradawl, chisel, mallet and plane,
A will to work, and health in my thews,
And season'd wood of a good clean grain
Shaping under my hands and skill,
And obeying my master-will

(Speaking)

And I alone : that's the best of it here.—

These book-read folks won't beat that song of mine,

I warrant. I'll have a right tune for it some day :

Hammer and nails, gimlet and screws,

Bradawl, chisel, mallet and plane,

A will to work

The outer door is pusht open, and a woman comes in, tired and worn, wet through, with a long shabby cloak on her. She stands a moment gazing round the room.

Woman : Alone ?

Was it you buzzing to yourself I heard ?

Grumbling for company ?

The young man stares at her and answers mechanically

Joiner : For company ? I'd liever keep to myself.

Woman : Dreaming aloud, then ?— Ay, cleverest thing

THE STAIRCASE

Lascelles Abercrombie

To do against the world, for sure, is dreaming.
But it needs shelter.— Well, go on dreaming.
I'll borrow your warmth awhile ; the drench of the rain
Is dribbling down my skin inside my clothes
Cold as worms.

She sits by the fire, opens her cloak, and shows she is holding a baby. She begins to suckle it.

Joiner : You've got a baby !

Woman : Well done, young man !
You know a thing or two : a baby it is.—
Finish your job, and I'll keep on at mine.

Joiner: I'm all but done here now.

Woman : What were you at ?

Joiner: Framing the new stairs. Are you travelling?

Woman : Travelling and travelling ; still walking.

Joiner: A strange place for you to be walking, here.

Woman : I'll swear to that : strange and miserable.
Not such another road in Christendom
For wind that's carrying a cruel rain
To get the better of your heart.

Joiner : I mean,
The road goes nowhere, but to these few huts
That stick against the hillside.

Woman : I know that—
Now I am here I know it.— But at least
The road has brought me to your fire. Young man,
Why do you stare so ? Do you know my face ?
You don't belong here ?

Joiner : Five miles off I live.

Woman : Ah [*Her talk seems meant to cover some feeling.*]

They are pretty work, your stairs :
They look too white in this curst filthy room ;
Like a mind where the dirty world has lived and slept,
But still remembering in midst of the soil
Some childish morning spent in games and laughter
Under a blowing orchard.— [*As he is still silent.*]
Ay, queer to find fresh work in such a place.
Is the house set then to a new-comer ?
Who will first climb your stairs ? A girl, maybe,
Upon her wedding night. She'll slip away
From off her husband's knees, and dance up swift,
Giggling shy and happily afraid,
And the house falls quiet of their talk ; and then
The old joists creak as she moves in her undressing ;
Then the lad slinks up after, like a robber.

Joiner : It's strange ! A little while before you came,
It was with just that fancy I was idling.

Woman : I warrant, you yourself were the lad, then.

Joiner (simply) : Yes.

Woman : And the girl ?

Joiner : I don't know—rightly—

Woman : Which to choose ?

Joiner : O long ago I made my choice : and yet—
I have not seen her.

Woman (after a little pause) : I could dream once myself.—

[*Then amused at his simplicity :*]

But will you know her — What would you say if I
Went up those stairs of yours ?

Joiner (startled, staring at her) : You ? You ?

I did not think you were putting fun upon me.

Woman (looking back at him with amused bitterness) :

Indeed, you are in the right :

I am naught to visit a young man's dreams.

But I was gibing at myself, not you :

I mind my manners : beggars thrive by them.

Joiner (gently) : Are you begging your way ?

Woman : Yes ; I want food.

Joiner : If you'll come home with me—

Woman : Five miles away !

No, I will warm myself, and something dry

'The heavy moisture that has made my skirts

Rasp the skin off my ankles.—Were the old stairs

Rotten past mending ?

Joiner : Crumbling into holes.

No nature left in the wood but must and dry-rot :

I knockt 'em into powder. The old man,

Who lived here by himself, was coming down,

And caught his heel at top ; the tread broke through,

Tript his footing—

Woman (repressing eagerness) : And he hurt himself ?

Joiner : Smasht his wicked old back bone.

Woman : Why, you seem
To hate the man.

Joiner : A gallows snarling tyke.

Woman : What had you against him ?

Joiner : He would have known what
If I'd had chance to bring his wicked blood
Blushing about his ears.

Woman : There's a bold fellow ;
To wish he could have boxt an old man's ears !

Joiner : No ; but I would have had such words for him,
His wizened heart had been ashamed.

Woman : Why, then,
Happen the old man might have boxt your ears !

Joiner : Ay, have your game with me : but if he'd been
A giant with a rage like a burning demon's,
I would have faced his wildness.

Woman : Well, he's dead,
And talk's an easy thing. But I've heard tell—
For on the road, young man, your ears find out
Noises from every corner in the land—
I've heard he was a terrible fierce old fellow.

Joiner : Likely enough.
You'd hear, too, of the scoundrel thing he did
Upon his daughter : you could scarce miss that ;
The villainous sound of it must be ranging still.

Woman : But what seems loud to you among these hills,
And a rough splash in a quiet creek of life,
Will hardly push a little shaking whisper
Into the air of the broad troubled world.—
Was it a pretty wench ?

Joiner : Why, you'd be bound,
If she were here, to think there's none in all
The room of the land could show their beauty off,
But only as lighting matches in the sun.

Woman : I would be bound to think so !

Joiner : Yes: she'd come.

Like you, suppose now, out of the windy rain ;
She'd have been tussling with its force against her
Like a young girl laughing with her brother
Because he plays mock-ruffian ; and the game
Would shine still in her eyes as she came in ;
And she'd be walking lightly with the glee
Would seem to sing in her body, all so thrilled
From the wind's pouring through her dress. It would
Be strange to see her, a strange and lovely thing
To see her coming back here after all.

Woman (laughing) : This is a wonder ! And so she's your fancy,
The girl so friendly to your loneliness !
I'll hurt myself with laughing ! This is the girl
Who slipt away from whispering in the firelight
To run with pretty laughter up your stairs ?

Joiner : Well, if she is ?

Woman : Isn't it queer you know
Just how the girl would look ?

Joiner : I'd swear to her !

Woman : And it's a minute gone, you said your eyes
Had never lived upon her !—

Joiner: You've made me a fool now, I suppose. You're welcome.
But I was bound to talk so, being so long
Here in the house, that somehow must, I'm sure,
Remember her—the timber and the stone
That felt the sound of her laughter and her ways—

Woman : O let's have little of that.—Why did you play
This lying game on me ?

Joiner (amazed) : Why did I play—?

Woman (standing up) : Lies! Lies! What were all your lies for?

Joiner (catching her anger) : How will a roadster know the lies
[from truth,

Who has to lie for her eating, lie for her lodging,
And the whole gear of her life is lies?

Woman : It's true :
We lie for needs : you for a fleering scoff.

Joiner : You've had no harm from me ; and let your tongue
Make sure of this, so long as we're in talk :
This girl, and the way the thought of her has grown
Within my brain— O, like rivers pouring
Full from the flooded hills,—

Woman : You'll lose yourself
Bragging her up so handsome ; I'll help you out :
This is the thing you mean?—
It would be like a hand with grimy fingers
Meddling in the fine make of a clock, to let
Talk common as mine touch your fancying
That goes so smooth and chimes to you so dainty.
Well, I'll believe 'tis fancies, and not lies :
But I must have my laugh at them.

Joiner : Yes, laugh, laugh ;
It's pretty joking.—There's a girl grows up
Beautiful and sweet hearted : and there comes
A rogue sneaking into her innocence,
Wheedling and living there ; and she, dear fool,
Comforting him ; and he blabbing abroad
The simple way her love had askt him in.

Woman : Did he do that ?

Joiner : Yes, such a blackguard he was.
But how would a girl so happy know his mind
Was just a muddy puddle ?—She'd only see
The face of her own love there, looking back.—

Woman : The pitiful fool. Ah, but it's fools you like.

Joiner : You'd like the folk who went about to stir
That wild brute of anger in her father,
And pitcht their buzzing jeers just loud enough
To startle it, and make it savage her.
They quickly had him crazed. Soon as he hears
The village sniggering its dirty gossip,
And knows his daughter's come to trouble and danger—

Woman : Through being a pitiful fool—

Joiner : He thrashes her,
Thrashes her, and rails her out of the house,
Childing as she was : and heavily
To trudge after the slinking runagate
Who fouled her, the poor lass must go alone.—
Five years ago it would be. O, if I'd heard,
She need not have gone crying into hiding !
And lightly I learnt the tale of it all at first :
But it slipt over my mind like a noosed wire
That snares a rabbit's neck, and the peg fails,
And puss goes free : the gin has not left go,
But tightens still and cankers into her life.
Just so the story of how they shamed the girl
Clung like a loop of wire and gnawed its hold
Upon my mind : whenever I work alone,

I'm thinking of the world breaking her spirit,
And turning into misery the heart
That was so blithe and singing.
Well, here's for you to laugh at. Why don't you laugh?

Woman : I'm thinking of that old man, left alone
With shame upon his age, and dying alone.

Joiner : And she has none to think of her but me !
Even the thought of kindness keeps itself
Safe from a life like hers, as rats will jump
In harbour from a boat fierce weather has strained.

Woman : Somebody told you that too ?—
You have the brave life, always among notions !
But you're not fair to rats. What have they done
That you should liken them to charity ?
This would be better : Vermin crawling out
From the clothes of a beggar's corpse, soon as they feel
The warmth of their lodging chill. I have not lived
In notions, but in seeing things ; that's one :
Cold morning, a white road, and at the side
A tramp lies dead of starving, and all round him
Ugh ! *[Her voice begins to accuse him.]*
And I've a mind to stop you cockering
Your halfling blood. What right have you to be
So brave and comfortable with your dreams
Of that lost fool—you always in a house—
While she, the truth of them, goes broad awake
In agony ?

Joiner : Wouldn't I do her all
The good a man can think of ? Why must you gibe ?
It's only that she's gone, she's never heard of.

Woman : She might come back.

Joiner : Be sure I'll know of it.

Woman : Yes, I believe you will.

Then what will you do with her ?

Joiner : What's that to you ?

Woman : Why, I should know what you will do with me.

Come now ; you must have thought it out.

Joiner : With you ?

You mean . . . ? Are you for fooling me again ?

Woman : And bitter fooling now. I am the girl.

Joiner : You're not. You can't be. Often I've heard tell—

Woman : Of pretty looks and laughing ways. Five years

Of following a tramping labourer

Will alter that. This baby's not the first,

The other two are dead. And I've been chapt,

And I've been tired out, and clemm'd and burnt

With walking through the winds and the hot days ;

It's just a frame I am beneath my clothes.

You made your fancy of my spirit breaking ;

The fancy would have been too wise to live

If it had heeded how my body fared

Out there on the road, ageing and grieving.—

Wonderful, isn't it, how dreams come true ?

Joiner : You're clever with your wiles. You've tript me up
Once already ; but I'm not caught this time.

Woman : Ay, but you are ; you're trapt and floundering.

Listen : I'll prove myself. What would bring me here ?

The road ends in the nowhere of the hills ;

THE STAIRCASE

Lascelles Abercrombie

A blind man's feet could tell that from the ruts
And the sward that's all across it. Why should I come
Such an unlikely way, with hunger on me
No longer anguish, but a load, a load ?
I came to find my father.— O my pride
I've eaten long since ; and poor meat it was,
No stay in it for me or for my bairn.—
I thought my dad might pay a shilling or two
For the sight of me still in my misery ;
Or maybe only a morsel ; that would do—
Stop me starving my baby. Nowhere else
Dare we be asking, or chance showing ourselves ;
For we go cunning as stoats, my man and I :
Anyone looking at us may be the law.

Joiner : You're escaping the law?— It was not you, I'll vow, that did the wrong.

Woman : I did my share.
You mind these rick-fires, kept the nights aglow
For near a week, until the rain set in ?—
It might have been the nights they have in the north
Among the foundries, where they smelt the iron,
And furnaces keep glaring at the clouds
Till it's like red hot weather above the darkness.—
I reckon we had you watching the sky ! Each night
A blazing rick, ten or twelve miles from the last !—
He swore he'd rouse the land. No one at all
Would give us jobs—a tramp and his homeless doxy.
And a queer time I had with him and his fists ;
Till the rage seemed to addle in his brain,
And he could think of naught but stacks to fire.

But he'll be tried for blood as well as burning,
If it's the truth we heard. A shippen caught
And sent the blaze along its thatch to the house ;
And in the scare there was a child forgot
That slept alone in the attic.— Well, my boy
Is like to be clemm'd for his death : it's all one,
Hunger and cold, or fire.— I hope the lad
Was stifled first, though ; I've been praying that.

Joiner : And it's you telling me this, as calm as news
Of prices at the market !

Woman : Now do you see ?
I've put myself clean into your mercy.
Would I have riskt your mind, without I were
Your own fine dream rousing you into daylight ?—
This takes you down from your fool'd life, I think !
So will you give us up, my man and I ?
He's known for his talk : there'll be a cry abroad
After us, I'll be bound.— You'll not, I know ;
Because I am your lovely dream come true.—
Surely 'tis time you were pleased.

Joiner : O let me be !
Give me a little while to breathe myself.

Woman : Indeed
It goes up hill, out of a dream to truth.
But I've come down a little ; I thought to find
My old angry father ; and I find you !—
Now, are we right yet ? Or shall I tell you where
The stairs were rotted worst ?— Third from top :
Half of it flimsy and soft as blanket, half
Gaping open.

Joiner : Ay, there the old brute tript.

Woman : And with him died our last poor chance of food.
We'd best be off now, baby. [*But she makes no attempt to go. A short pause; then she laughs.*]

Joiner : Will you forgive me?

Woman : What, for making me
Your fancy game?— I've had worse things to carry.

Joiner : O make an end of that talk!—It's the truth
I have at last, after all my dreaming.

Woman : I'll lay, it seems like when they scorch a pig
After a killing!—Rubbish of straw and waste
Flares high and bold in a wind of golden flame
And streaking sparks—a young man's mind of fancies.
Then 'tis a mound of smoulder, crumbling in
To show parcht awkward trotters sticking up,
Flap ears and senseless snouted head, and all
The poor pig's blacken'd hulk : and there's the truth
Was hid inside a young man's burning dreams!—
Well, I am not the sop I was ; there is
A dry side to me now. So I'll be kind
And take the truth I am out of your sight.

Joiner : I let you go? You think that's likely yet?

Woman (uneasy) : Are you for doing like the fool shown up
Who braves his folly out by staying in it?

Joiner : You shall stay in it, too!— It goes up hill,
You said, the way out of my dream ; uphill
And the sun behind the hill ! And now I've climbed
Where nothing stops the light, not even dreams.
We'll not get higher than this, either of us.

If we can't hold now to our meeting here,
Here on the top of life, where every side
Is a slope falling, 'tis for both of us
From this on going downward into shadows,
Never again to be in sight or hail.

Woman : If I'm not gone quickly, we're both in danger.

Joiner : Will you not dare believe my meaning ?

Woman : No.——

I'll only think, " Suppose, suppose he meant it ! "——

Joiner : Why, we're awake, and the dream still crying aloud !

Woman : You close your mind to it. No hurt in dreams ;
But this that sounds so drawing—safer would be
A viper hissing. 'Tis the truth of the world
Persuading you to come into its reach.

Joiner : And the sound's drawing you !

Woman : O, I must hear

Everything I have lost—everything
That is not the old cunning torturer,
The world's merciless truth !—You'd never keep me
Safe from the world in hiding of your dreams ;
The world would come for me, and strike you there.—
I to be looking for a dream again,
And you for truth to please you like your dreams——
It would be a wild-hearted game to play !

Joiner : I did not mean it for a game, the while
I've been as good to my mind as to the steel
I work with, all for the sake of finding you :
Rusted metal, you know, may be wrought clean
As glass, but the rust lies within, for ever
Spoiling the finest temper.

Woman : Can you not see
The rust of the world has eaten to my heart ?

Joiner : Can you not see that my main life has been
Knowing of you held by the handling world
All as it likes, and I the one to wring
The vile grasp off from you ? Don't make my life
Break its promise to me, so nearly kept !—
I have gone hungry for this hour.

Woman : And I,
Have I not hunger'd ? Thank your God you kept
Your hunger empty. I famisht, and was fed
On filthy poison, worse than being starved.
— I never thought to have a mind again
That need not be ashamed of being alive !—
You do not mean I should—love you ?

Joiner : No, no ;
We are not bargaining.

Woman : I doubt I could not,
Even if I were wishing to.—
Listen to me. Think God is eyeing you,
And tell me fairly, 'tis a man's set mind
You have to—help me.

Joiner : I'll make you another life !
'Tis your say now.

Woman : Sometimes it might be,
In the hot dusty drouth of afternoon,
We'd pass a byre, and hear the milkers chat,—
Girls laughing,—and spirted milk ring in the cans.
Or plodding stupidly on in windy dark,

Our steps would sound against a cottage wall
Sleeping beside the lane : I'd lean on it ;
Warmth would be in it ; I'd think of a drowzy fire
Inside the house, and hear the crickets chime.—
Young man, I'll risk you ! Let us be off, quick,
Else he'll be coming in on us.

Joiner : He ? Who ?

Woman : The man that was my man.

Joiner : He's nothing now.

Woman : He was my man.

Joiner : No need to think of him.—
I've naught to say but—thank you.

Woman : Thank me ?

Joiner : Yes !

Now I've a thing to do at last.

Woman : But you,
Never you look to have me thanking you ;
For that might set me telling what I've been,
The shame I have been, the dirt !— You must not know it.
(*With a gesture*) O but if there is something in the world
That can do good, and listens when 'tis called,
I shall be asking it to stay with you ;
You have made room for me where never again
I thought to live.— It goes beyond my thanks.

Joiner : There's stumbling outside, coming up the path.

Woman : We should have gone before this !—'Tis my man.

The Tramp comes in.

Tramp : Now where's the food ?

Woman : My father's dead, they tell me.

Tramp : I don't want your father ; I'm for eating.
You said there'd be food here.

Woman : 'Tis not my fault ;
How could I know if he were gone or living ?

Tramp : O, you keep on like a parrot. Food's the thing.

Woman : A thing you'll have to walk some further for.

Tramp : Why did you turn us here ? To play hot-cockles
Safe with a lad ?

Joiner (to the Woman) : You're not to talk with him.

Tramp : Not talk ?—She'll have to talk about the food
She made out we'd be having here. Where is it ?

Woman : Are you fuddled ? There's none here.

Tramp : None, by God !
Not a bite ?

Woman : Not a bite.

Tramp (going towards her) : Then take your lesson !
You'll feel my ten commandments now : you'll learn
The way of them by heart. [*The woman, standing up, instinctively
picks up the baby and holds it as her
protection.*]

Lay the brat down !
Put down that bastard, or he'll grow up lame
As you'll be when I've done you.
[*She lays the baby down and faces him.*]

Ay, that's wiser :
You mind what came of that trick once ?—And now
I'll twinge your arm till it crackles.

Woman : No, not that !

Joiner : I've payed out rope enough. I'll fasten it now
Taut, and you've hung yourself.—Round on your heels
And out of doors!

Tramp : This isn't your ado ;
Keep out.

Joiner : You march now : I'll not bid you again.

Tramp : Have I to down you first before I tan
My woman? Do you call that fair? It's low.
I'm hunger-starved and done—just enough heart
Left in me for lathering her ; and you
Push in, you with your belly crammed and good :
It's low! Stand off and be an Englishman.

Joiner : You're too long standing. Will you have your teeth
So quaked in your head, you'll never chew again
Happily? Off out of this!

Tramp (half whimpering with weakness and anger) : Mate, fair play.
Too bad it is. She cheats me of a meal
And should be taught right. Ay, and you'd have seen,
If she had kept her word and found me meat,
I am a man when I'm fed could do for you
And lick her finely as well out of her lies :
A job for each hand that. But now—
There's nothing fair in the world, after this!

Joiner : You'll have it then?

Tramp (in a rage) : And empty as I be
I'll match you : win or lose, she'll pay me for it
When we're alone.

Woman (looking out through the open door) : Have you been showing
[yourself?

Tramp (apprehensive at once) : What is it now ?

Woman : Three men, mighty cautious,
And almost here.

Tramp : They'll not find me. [*Making for the door.*]

Woman : You fool,
They're right in front.

Tramp : You bitch, you have me trapt !
O I will need to go into hard training
If I'm to pay you the fair price for this !

Woman : Ay, shout to them " Here's your man ! "

Tramp : What will I do ?—
Up the stairs and out of a window and off,
That's my road. [*He goes upstairs.*]

Woman : There's the first to take your stairs

Joiner : And a good use for them ; it quits us of him.

Three Men come in (1, 2, & 3.)

1. Ay, there he is !

2. The man !

3. The very man !

I markt him well, nosing the taproom whiff
Beside the door, and fearing to go in.

1. You see his cunning ?

2. Why, he's washt his face !

3. 'Tis that ! I thought he lookt another man !

1. But not this way you'll put off eyes like ours.

Woman : O will they take him ?— I'd not plotted that !

Joiner : Ay, the thing plans itself, once we can hold
Their crazy pother.

Woman : Keep them blundering
A while, a little while !

2. We'll have to go
Carefully about him.

3. Ay, 'tis a face
With gallows in it. When I saw him leant
Beside the taproom door, with his eyes cadging,
I thought, " There's a slaughtering visnomy ! "

1. I've no notion at all of seeing him hanged
For murdering me.

2. Young fellow, own to yourself !
You're the rick-burner.

3. Ay, and he burnt a lad.

Joiner : Do hold your blathering a bit and hear me.
Or if you won't, see this. [*Holding up a hammer.*]

1. He means battery !

2. Dreadful things can be done with a hammer.

3. When he
That uses it is wild and knows the way
Through your skull and into your brain.

Joiner : Do stop !
I am the joiner here. Yonder's my work,
The staircase. And the man you want has bolted
Up to the loft, and you have him caged and safe.

1. Are there weapons upstairs ?

Joiner : Go on and take him.
The room's bare boards and walls, and he's as weak
With famishing as a fly.

2. Well, if you're sure

You're not the man——

3. No, no ; I saw right off
He had the look of someone else.

1. (*Marshalling them at the staircase*) Now for it !

2. Mind the reward that's posted for him !

3. Charge !

[*They rush up the stairs.*

Joiner : This falls out well. Here's an easy riddance,
And the way smooth from here.

Woman : Were you not told
To break out larger windows in the attics ?
They're cruel small !

Joiner : Cruel and small indeed
To one who thinks of squeezing his escape
Through one of them.— But I can hear they have him.

[*The three men come down with the TRAMP.*

1. The man for certain this time.

Tramp : Copt ! copt !

Woman : We couldn't flee for ever. Is it far,
The way to the jail ? They'll give us food there, likely.

2 (*to the WOMAN*). What, are you coming too ?

Woman : Yes, I'm coming.

3. Were you in with his burnings ?

Woman : They are mine
As much as his. I screened his light from draughts.

Joiner : He made her do it !—(*to the WOMAN*) There's no need for

Tramp : Copt is the word ! [this !

Woman : And I am glad it's over.

Joiner : It's over right enough ; the whole black time
Is over now. Must you see him to jail ?
How can you make your duty such a thing ?

Woman : You'll never want a flatterer, young man,
Not while your own tongue lives. Who said I made
Going with him my duty ?

1. Settle your mind

And choose your man, missis : come on or stay.

Woman : And you talk civil, mister ! Choose my man !

Joiner (to the TRAMP) : You will not drag her with you ?

Woman : O, you have
Queer sense in you ! Who's dragging me at all ?

Joiner (to the TRAMP) : Have you not had enough of injuring her ?
Go off from her at last !

Tramp : Copt ! Fair copt !

Woman : Thank you for lending me your fire, young man.
(to the men) Not budging yet ? [*They begin to go out.*]
Bless my wits, I was leaving you the brat !
Is it still raining ? I must lap him well :
There is a trouble in his breath already.

[*When the JOINER is left alone and the door closed,
the curtain comes down.*]

At five o'clock one April morn
I met them making tracks,
Young Benjamin and Abel Horn,
With bundles on their backs.

Young Benjamin is seventy-five,
Young Abel, seventy-seven—
The oldest innocents alive
Beneath that April heaven.

I asked them why they trudged about
With crabby looks and sour—
“And does your mother know you're out
At this unearthly hour?”

They stopped: and scowling up at me
Each shook a grizzled head,
And swore; and then spat bitterly,
As with one voice they said:

“Homeless, about the country-side
We never thought to roam;
But mother, she has gone and died,
And broken up the home.”

His body bulged with puppies—little eyes
Peeped out of every pocket, black and bright ;
And with as innocent, round-eyed surprise
He watched the glittering traffic of the night.

“What this world’s coming to I cannot tell,”
He muttered, as I passed him, with a whine—
“Things surely must be making slap for hell,
When no one wants these little dogs of mine.”

I saw three black pigs riding
In a blue and yellow cart—
Three black pigs riding to the fair
Behind the old grey dappled mare—
But it wasn't black pigs riding
In a gay and gaudy cart
That sent me into hiding
With a flutter in my heart.

I heard the cart returning,
The jolting jingling cart—
Returning empty from the fair
Behind the old jog-trotting mare—
But it wasn't the returning
Of a clattering, empty cart
That sent the hot blood burning
And throbbing through my heart.

I dreamt of wings,—and waked to hear
Through the low sloping ceiling clear
The nesting starlings flutter and scratch
Among the rafters of the thatch,
Not twenty inches from my head ;
And lay, half-dreaming, in my bed,
Watching the far elms, bolt-upright
Black towers of silence in a night
Of stars, square-framed between the sill
Of the casement and the eaves, until
I drowsed, and must have slept a wink . . .
And wakened to a ceaseless clink
Of hammers ringing on the air . . .
And, somehow, only half-aware,
I'd risen, and crept down the stair,
Bewildered by strange, smoky gloom,
Until I'd reached the living-room
That once had been a nailshop-shed.
And where my hearth had blazed, instead
I saw the nail-forge glowing red ;
And, through the stife and smoky glare,
Three dreaming women standing there
With hammers beating red-hot wire
On tinkling anvils, by the fire,
To ten-a-penny nails ; and heard—
Though none looked up or breathed a word—
The song each heart sang to the tune
Of hammers, through a Summer's noon,
When they had wrought in that red glow,
Alive, a hundred years ago—

The song of girl and wife and crone,
Sung in the heart of each alone . . .

The dim-eyed crone with nodding head—
“He’s dead; and I’ll, too, soon be dead.”

The grave-eyed mother, gaunt with need—
“Another little mouth to feed!”

The black-haired girl, with eyes alight—
“I’ll wear the yellow beads to-night.”

THE SHAFT

He must have lost his way, somehow. 'Twould seem
He'd taken the wrong turning, back a bit,
After his lamp . . . Or was it all a dream
That he'd nigh reached the cage—his new lamp lit
And swinging in his hand, and whistling, glad
To think the shift was over—when he'd tripped
And stumbled, like the daft, club-footed lad
His mother called him ; and his lamp had slipped
And smashed to smithereens ; and left him there
In pitchy dark, half-stunned, and with barked shins ?
He'd cursed his luck ; although he didn't care,
Not overmuch ; you suffered for your sins ;
And, anyway, he must be nigh the shaft ;
And he could fumble his way out somehow,
If he were last, and none came by. 'Twas daft
To do a trick like thon.

And even now

His mother would be waiting. How she'd laugh
To hear about it ! She was always game
For fun, she was, and such a one for chaff.
A fellow had no chance. But 'twas the same
With women always ; you could never tell
What they'd be at, or after saying next ;
They'd such queer, tricky tongues ; and it was well
For men to let them talk when they were vexed—
Although, his mother, she was seldom cross.
But she'd be wondering now, ay, that she would—
Hands folded in her apron, at a loss
To know what kept him, even now she stood,
Biting her lips, he'd warrant. She aye bit

Her lips till they were white when things went wrong.
She'd never liked his taking to the pit,
After his father'd . . . Ay, and what a song
She'd make . . . and supper cold ! It must be late.
The last on the last shift ! After to-day
The pit was being laid idle. Jack, his mate,
Had left him tidying, hurrying away,
To back . . . And no night-shift . . .

If that cursed lamp

Had not gone out . . . But that was hours ago—
How many hours he couldn't tell. The cramp
Was in his thighs. And what could a lad know
Who'd crawled for hours upon his hands and knees
Through miles on miles of hot, black, dripping night
Of low-roofed, unfamiliar galleries ?
He'd give a hundred pound to stand upright
And stretch his legs a moment : but, somehow,
He'd never reached a refuge, though he'd felt
The walls on either hand. He'd bumped his brow
Till he was dizzy. And the heat would melt
The marrow in his bones. And yet he'd gone
A dozen miles at least, and hadn't found
Even a crossway. On and on and on
He'd crawled, and crawled ; and never caught a sound
Save water dripping, dripping, or the creak
Of settling coal. If he could only hear
His own voice even ; but he dared not speak
Above a whisper . . .

There was naught to fear ;

And he was not afraid of aught, not he !
He would come on a shaft, before he knew.

He couldn't miss. The longest gallery
Must end somewhere or other; though 'twas true
He hadn't guessed the drift could be so long.

If he had not come straight . . . If he had turned,
Unknowing, in the dark . . . If he'd gone wrong
Once, then why not a dozen times! It burned
His very heart to tinder, just to think
That he, maybe, was crawling round and round
And round and round, and hadn't caught a blink
Of light at all, or hadn't heard a sound . . .
'Twas queer, gey queer . . .

Or was he going daft,
And only dreaming he was underground
In some black pit of hell, without a shaft—
Just one long gallery that wound and wound,
Where he must crawl for ever with the drip
Of lukewarm water drumming on his back . . .
'Twas nightmare, surely, had him in its grip.
His head was like to split, his spine to crack . . .
If he could only call, his mother'd come
And shake him; and he'd find himself in bed . . .
She'd joke his fright away . . . But he was dumb,
And couldn't shout to save himself . . . His head
Seemed full of water, dripping, dripping, dripping . . .
And he, somehow, inside it—huge and dark
His own skull soared above him . . . He kept slipping,
And clutching at the crumbling walls . . . A spark
Flared suddenly; and to a blood-red blaze
His head was bursting; and the pain would break . . .
'Twas solid coal he'd run against, adaze—

Coal, sure enough. And he was broad awake,
And crawling still through that unending drift
Of some old working, long disused. He'd known
That there were such. If he could only lift
His head a moment ; but the roof of stone
Crushed low upon him. A gey narrow seam
He must be in,—and bad to work : no doubt
That's why 'twas given up. He'd like to scream,
His cut knees hurt so sorely ; but a shout
Might bring the crumbling roof down on his head,
And squash him flat.

If he could only creep

Between the cool white sheets of his own bed,
And turn towards the wall, and sleep, and sleep—
And dream, maybe, of pigeons soaring high,
Turning and tumbling in the morning light,
With wings ashimmer in a cloudless sky.
He'd give the world to see a bonnie flight
Of his own pigeons rise with flapping wings,
Soaring and sweeping almost out of sight,
Till he was dizzy, watching the mad things
Tossing and tumbling at that dazzling height.
Ay, and his homers, too—if they'd come in,
He hoped his mother'd fed them. They would be
Fair famished after such a flight, and thin.

But she would feed them, sure enough ; for she
Liked pigeons, too—would stand there at the door
With arms akimbo, staring at the blue,
Her black eyes shining as she watched them soar,
Without a word, till they were out of view.

And how she laughed to hear them scold and pout,
Ruffle and fuss—like menfolk, she would say,
Nobody knowing what 'twas all about,
And least of all themselves. That was her way,
To joke and laugh the tantrums out of him.
He'd tie his neckerchief before the glass ;
And she'd call him her pigeon, Peter Prim,
Preening himself, she'd say, to meet his lass—
Though he'd no lass, not he ! A scarf well tied,
No gaudy colours, just a red or yellow,
Was what he fancied. What harm if he tried
To keep himself respectable ! A fellow—
Though womenfolk might laugh and laugh . . .

And now

He wondered if he'd hear her laugh again
With hands on hips and sparkling eyes. His brow
Seemed clamped with red-hot iron bands ; and pain
Shot red-hot needles through his legs—his back,
A raw and aching spine that bore the strain
Of all the earth above him : the dead black
Unending clammy night blinding his brain
To a black blankness shot with scarlet streaks
Of searing lightning ; and he scarcely knew
If he'd been crawling hours, or days, or weeks . . .
And now the lightning glimmered faintly blue,
And gradually the blackness paled to grey :
And somewhere, far ahead, he caught the gleam
Of light, daylight, the very light of day,
Day, dazzling day !

Thank God, it was no dream.

He felt a cooler air upon his face ;

And scrambling madly for some moments more
Though centuries it seemed, he reached the place
Where through the chinks of the old crumbling door
Of a disused upcast-shaft, grey ghostly light
Strained feebly, though it seemed the sun's own blaze
To eyes so long accustomed to the night
And peering blindly through that pitchy maze.

The door dropped from its hinges—and upright
He stood, at last, bewildered and adaze,
In a strange dazzling world of flowering white.
Plumed snowy fronds and delicate downy sprays,
Fantastic as the feathery work of frost,
Drooped round him from the wet walls of the shaft—
A monstrous growth of mould, huge mould. And lost
In wonder he stood gaping; and then laughed
To see that living beauty—quietly
He laughed to see it: and awhile forgot
All danger. He would tell his mother: she
Would scarce know whether to believe or not,—
But laugh to hear how, when he came on it,
It dazzled him. If she could only see
That fluffy white—come on it from the pit,
Snow-white as fantails' feathers, suddenly
As he had, she'd laugh too: she . . .

Icy cold
Shot shuddering through him, as he stept beneath
A trickle. He looked up. That monstrous mould
Frightened him; and he stood with chattering teeth,
Seeming to feel it growing over him
Already, shutting out the fleck of sky

That up the slimy shaft gleamed far and dim.
'Twould flourish on his bones when he should lie
Forgotten in the shaft. Its clammy breath
Was choking him already. He would die,
And no one know how he'd come by his death. . .
Dank, cold mould growing slowly. By and by
'Twould cover him; and not a soul to tell . . .

With a wild cry he tried to scramble out,
Clutching the wall . . . Mould covered him . . . He fell,
As, close at hand, there came an answering shout.







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